

October 2011

*“We Must Find
Common Ground,
Children’s Lives are
Wasting”*

POLICY

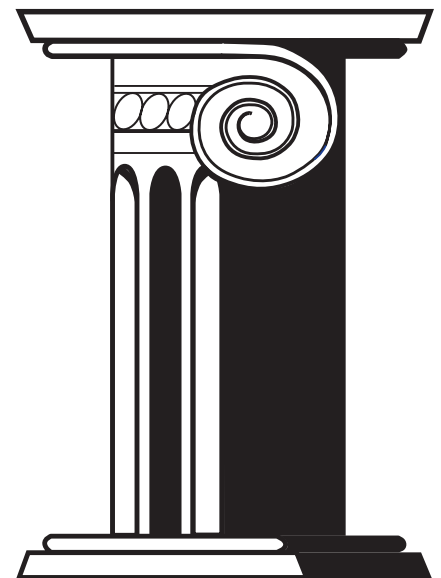
STUDY

No. 11-8

by

**Deborah D. Thornton
Public Interest Institute
Mt. Pleasant, IA**

PUBLIC INTEREST



I N S T I T U T E

POLICY STUDY

October 2011

No. 11-8

Public Interest Institute

**Dr. Don Racheter,
President**

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“We Must Find Common Ground, Children’s Lives are Wasting”

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“We must find common ground on this issue...children’s lives are wasting as we dawdle.”¹

- New Jersey Governor Chris Christie,
Iowa Governor’s Education Summit,
July 26, 2011

Executive Summary

“Common ground on this issue,” said Governor Christie to a silent and attentive room.

What issue?

The issue of education. The issue of providing opportunities for our children to learn to their highest abilities. The issue of ensuring that all children in Iowa are offered and receive the best education possible, that all our children are challenged and motivated to learn, to be their best.

The issue of helping every child to grow up to be a successful and productive adult. All Iowans have a vested interest in providing our children with a good education.

Parents have a key role, as they have the final responsibility. Importantly, parents have the right and the job of demanding that the schools provide the education their children are entitled to and deserve.

Unfortunately, too many parents and community members do not make those demands. Too many are going along with the monopoly of the government school system. Too many think their children are learning the things they need to know, only to later find out that they did not. Only to find out that their time and their child’s time has been wasted.

One of the things Governor Christie was specifically talk-

ing about is “school choice.”

What is school choice?

Many people do not know or understand what the phrase means. They do not understand how school choice is any different or better than “regular” school. How is it funded? What do parents, children, and teachers have to do differently?

School choice is not about doing away with government schools. It’s not about cutting funding or dismantling teacher’s unions. It’s not about race or income levels. It’s not about promoting one model or system as being better than another.

It is about making all schools better, about giving all families the freedom to ride the education train wherever and however they want. The freedom to choose the best school and the best opportunities for their individual child. This school might be government, private, charter, religious, secular, or even homeschooling.

The point of school choice is that it is a choice by the parents for their child.

This POLICY STUDY will address some of the challenges of Iowa’s current education system and outline the basic facts and status of school choice opportunities in Iowa today. It will not suggest that one aspect of school choice is better than another. That is not the point.

The point is that parents and children should be able to choose from a wide variety of learning options to find the one that meets their needs the best.

All elected officials, from the local school board to the President of the Iowa Senate, should be able to agree and support this common approach. Children’s lives are wasting as we dawdle.

Executive Summary

“Too many are going along with the monopoly of the government school system. Too many think their children are learning the things they need to know, only to later find out that they did not. Only to find out that their time and their child’s time has been wasted.”

“We Must Find Common Ground,

“Many people...think school choice is the unfinished battle of the civil rights movement. This battle is one Americans must be engaged in today, not yesterday and not tomorrow, but today. It is a battle for our children’s lives.”

Introduction

Michelle Bernard, Chairman of the Bernard Center for Women, Politics, and Public Policy, said, “School choice is a civil rights issue. It is the natural extension of *Brown v. Board of Education*, of what Thurgood Marshall and Dr. Martin Luther King talked about – access to great schools for families.”²

Many people, in addition to Ms. Bernard, think school choice is the unfinished battle of the civil rights movement. This battle is one Americans must be engaged in today, not yesterday and not tomorrow, but today. It is a battle for our children’s lives.

The issue is whether or not we, as Americans, truly believe that all children deserve a good education. Do we believe that all children are entitled to go to an effective, motivating, and challenging school? Do we believe that all children can achieve – growing up to be prepared and successful adults?

Or, as New Jersey Governor Chris Christie said at the Governor’s Education Summit in July, do we believe some children – but certainly not our own – have no other option besides failure?

Parents of upper-middle-class children, whether white or minority, generally have the ability and option of ensuring their children receive the best education possible. This may be in government schools, private schools, or even through homeschooling.

Many parents pay for private lessons and tutoring in everything from piano, to Spanish, to basketball. They research schools and school districts and may specifically move to a better district, buy a house in a better neighborhood.

For example, Rahm

Emanuel (Democrat), Mayor of Chicago, was recently asked about his decision to send his three children to the University of Chicago Laboratory School – known as one of the best private schools in the city – instead of enrolling them in the Chicago government schools.

The Chicago government schools have many serious issues, including high dropout rates, low achievement, and violent crime. If we lived in Chicago, my children would not be enrolled there. My husband grew up in Chicago, and he was not enrolled in the Chicago government schools – and that was forty years ago.

The reporter, Mary Ann Ahern of NBC News, asked whether or not Emanuel was “confident enough in the public school system to send his own children there.”³

Emanuel responded, “The decision I’m going to make as it relates to my kids, is one I’m going to make as a father.”⁴ He continued, “You’re asking me a value statement and not a policy. ... My children are my children. You have to understand that I’m making this decision as a father and that’s a decision I’m going to make. Anything less than that would be less than how I think of myself and want to be as a father.”⁵

Let me repeat, he said, “I’m making this decision as a father.” Further, he indicated that anything less than deciding to pay the money for a private school education would represent him doing less than his best as a father, providing his children with less than the best available.

Emanuel’s decision was a “value statement,” one all parents would like to be able to make, but often can not.

In fact, most lowans would probably not be able to send

their children to the University of Chicago Laboratory School. The annual tuition for high school is \$24,870, plus fees and extras potentially totaling another \$1,300.⁶ Mayor Emanuel is paying upwards of \$75,000 a year for the education of three children.

There are private scholarships, but no publicly funded scholarships, available to any child.

Arne Duncan (Democrat), the U.S. Secretary of Education, also sent his children to the Chicago Laboratory School. The previous mayor of Chicago, Richard Daley (Democrat), also chose to send his children to a private school. Most recent U.S. Presidents, including Barack Obama, have chosen to send their children to private schools. All had the means to pay the cash. Most Americans do not.

The University of Chicago Laboratory School is certainly an excellent choice for Mayor Emanuel's children. Of the 450 students in the high school, 99 percent of graduates go on to four-year colleges. There are 50 teachers and over 150 different courses offered.

On standardized national tests of achievement the students score very well. The mean ACT composite score for the class of 2011 was 29.9 of a possible 36. The middle 50 percent range was 27 – 33.

There were 12 national merit semi-finalists and another 18 commended students out of the 120 member graduating class.⁷ Over the last four years, 13 students have gone on to Princeton, 11 to Harvard, 16 to Yale, 18 to New York University, 9 to Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and 17 to the University of Southern California.⁸

Mayor Emanuel's children are attending school with what

are apparently some of the best and brightest students in the Chicago area. Shouldn't all children have that opportunity, irrespective of how much money their parents make?

Another public figure, New Jersey Governor Chris Christie (Republican), is also sending his children to a private school – this one Catholic. His response when questioned recently was, "First off, it's none of your business. I don't ask you where you send your kids to school. Don't bother me about where I send mine."

He continued, "Secondly I pay \$38,000 a year in property taxes for a public school system that my wife and I don't chose to utilize because we believe, we've decided as parents, that a religious education should be part of our children's everyday education so we send our children to parochial school."

"Third, I as governor am responsible for every child in this state, not just my own, and the decisions I make are to try to improve the educational opportunities of every child in this state."⁹ The responses to his comments were widely varied.

He and his wife certainly have the right to send their children to a Catholic school. That is their choice.

It is unfortunate that they, and every other parent sending their child to a parochial school, must not only pay the very high New Jersey property taxes, but also pay upwards of an additional \$15,000 or more per year to each child to attend a school of their choice.

While speaking at Governor Branstad's Education Summit on July 26, Christie elaborated, "We can decide today that the interest of these children is more important than how we decide political winning and losing... To say that change is necessary does not mean that

Children's Lives are Wasting"

"Most recent U.S. Presidents, including Barack Obama, have chosen to send their children to private schools. All had the means to pay the cash. Most Americans do not."

“We Must Find Common Ground,

“ Why is it that we still operate a system that does not reward excellence and does not give consequences for failure?”

you hate public education.

“Forget about who you want to blame...Let’s put that aside and let’s see what we can agree on,” Christie said. “Can’t we agree that there is failure?... Yet in the yelling and screaming that’s going on about education in this country, we miss that. There is failure, and that failure has real-life ramifications for those children. They’re the ones whose future is restricted.”¹⁰

Christie next suggested parents should not be blamed for the failure either. “That’s a response I hear all the time from opponents of real reform,” he said, asking a few moments later: “Are you really willing to live in a world that places failure as the only option at the feet of a child who can’t pick his or her parent?”

“We owe it to every child... to give them every opportunity for greatness,” he said. “Why is it that we still operate a system that does not reward excellence and does not give consequences for failure?”

“This is not a Republican or Democrat issue, this issue of choice. It is an economic issue,” Christie said. “... Why should that choice just be limited to me and Rahm Emanuel and other people of means to make those choices?”

He finished, “We must find common ground on this issue

and... children’s lives are wasting as we dawdle.”¹¹

Children’s Lives are Wasting – The Iowa Results

Unfortunately, most children in Iowa are not achieving at the same level as those in the University of Chicago Laboratory School. The recent report prepared for the Governor’s Education Summit outlines many of the key facts.

The school age population in Iowa has been declining steadily for over ten years. In 2000-2001 there were almost half a million, now there are about 475,000 students. The number of children who are Hispanic is now greater than the number who are African American, and the minority student population is almost 13 percent of the total.

Additionally, the number of students categorized as “English Language Learners” has almost doubled in the past 10 years. The number of students now classified as low-income based on their eligibility for free or reduced price lunch is over 175,000 – over a third of our students.

All of these changes in the student population have brought new challenges to our government school districts and teachers. Many of these children have struggled to be

Iowa Overall School Age Population Facts

	2000-2001	2009-2010
School Age Population	495,000	475,000
Hispanic	17,019	37,340
African American	18,510	23,882
Asian	8,274	9,169
English Language Learners	11,079	20,781
Free or Reduced Price Lunch	27%	37%

Source: *Rising to Greatness, 2011, Iowa Department of Education*

<<http://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/217757/7-19-rising-to-greatness-final.pdf>> accessed August 23, 2011

successful in school. However, as we shall see, the generic, middle-class white children are, in many ways, faring no better.

There are several tests and test timings that are generally considered to be key indices of academic success. One is fourth-grade reading. Prior to the fourth grade a student is learning to read. From fourth grade on one “reads to learn.” Thus, reading proficiency and excellence in the fourth grade is vital to future academic success.

The other is eighth-grade math proficiency. From eighth grade on, the student should be learning higher-level math skills. Therefore, they must display a solid grasp of the fundamentals in the eighth grade.

Unfortunately, most of our students did not meet or exceed either the reading or math benchmarks in the past, and are not improving today.

Fourth-Grade Reading Test Results

In 1992, on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) fourth-grade reading test, only 36 percent of the students scored at “proficient” or better. Sixty-four percent were “basic” or below. Improvement over the last 20 years has been non-existent. See the Table below.

One could argue that because of the increases in minority and low-income children and the resulting challenges, the results are actually pretty good. However, do we want to settle for these results for our children?

In the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), a test more familiar to most Iowa parents and taxpayers, the fourth-grade reading proficiency scores have been flat since 2002. This is across all socio-economic groups, so it continues the poor scores on the earlier NAEP tests. Whether or not there are more or less low-income or minority children, they are not scoring significantly different.

Seventy-seven percent of all fourth-grade students are “proficient” at reading. White, Hispanic, and African American children are all scoring about the same in 2010 as they scored in 2002. “Non-poor” children have made some increases, but still – 14 of 100 are not proficient readers in the 4th grade. See the table on the next page.

The achievement gap between the white children and the minority children is still 20 to 25 points. In the fourth grade almost half of these children can not read fluently.

One of the issues in discussing education and school-choice initiatives is that

Children’s Lives are Wasting”

“Unfortunately, most of our students did not meet or exceed either the reading or math benchmarks in the past, and are not improving today.”

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

Reading - Grade 4	1992	2009	Change
Iowa Average Score	225	221	-4
National Average Grade 4 Score	215	220	5
Below Basic	27%	31%	4
Basic	37%	35%	-2
Proficient	29%	27%	-2
Advanced	7%	7%	0

Source: *Rising to Greatness, 2011, Iowa Department of Education*

<http://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/217757/7-19-rising-to-greatness-final.pdf> accessed August 23, 2011

“We Must Find Common Ground,

everyone believes “their” school is the good one – and that all the others are the problem. The idea is that your child, and your neighbor’s child, seem to be doing fine – they are certainly smart and involved. The teacher does not call you with problems; they are not in detention or the Principal’s office.

It is the city kids that are the problem, or the rural children, or those who do not have two parents at home, or who do not have all the advantages, who are struggling.

Eighth-Grade Mathematics Test Results

When reviewing the eighth-grade math test results, the scores are not very encouraging either. While the national score has increased by 15 points since the benchmark year of 1992, the average score of Iowa students has remained flat, at 284. The percent of students scoring at or below basic is two-thirds, 66 percent. Those students scoring at or above proficient are 34 percent.

Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS)	2001-2002	2009-2010	Change
Reading - Grade 4	76.4%	77.5%	1.1
FRL Eligible	62.9%	65.6%	2.7
Non-Poor	81.8%	86.2%	4.4
Race - White	80.0%	81.0%	1
Race - Hispanic	59.0%	60.0%	1
Race - African American	55.0%	56.0%	1

Source: *Rising to Greatness, 2011, Iowa Department of Education*

<http://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/217757/7-19-rising-to-greatness-final.pdf> accessed August 23, 2011

“We – parents, taxpayers, and teachers – are failing all students equally.”

That perception is not true. All students, in all population areas, are about the same, as the table below shows. The scores of “non-poor white students” on the NAEP range from 227 in rural areas of Iowa to 236 in the suburbs, a difference of less than 10 points, and lower – across-the-board – than comparable students nationwide. We – parents, taxpayers, and teachers – are failing all students equally.

Again, only one-third of our eighth-grade students are ready to do higher-level math, such as algebra. One out of four can not do basic addition, subtraction, multiplication, or division.

The eighth-grade ITBS math scores, broken out by income and ethnic category, show some improvement in skills of Hispanic and African American students in math, but just less than half of the African American students are

National Assessment of Educational Progress - Non-Poor White Students

Reading - 4th Grade	Nation	Iowa
City	239	232
Suburb	237	236
Town	231	228
Rural	232	227

Source: *Rising to Greatness, 2011, Iowa Department of Education*

<http://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/217757/7-19-rising-to-greatness-final.pdf> accessed August 23, 2011

proficient. This is up from only a third in 2002, so there is some improvement, but not enough. Two of ten white students are not proficient, while four of ten low-income students are not proficient. The tables below detail these results.

Children's Lives are Wasting"

National Assessment of Educational Progress

Math - 8th Grade	1992	2009	Change
Iowa Average Score	283	284	1
National Average Grade 8 Score	267	282	15
Below Basic	24%	24%	0
Basic	45%	42%	-3
Proficient	27%	27%	0
Advanced	4%	7%	3

Source: *Rising to Greatness, 2011, Iowa Department of Education*

<http://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/217757/7-19-rising-to-greatness-final.pdf> accessed August 23, 2011

Iowa Test of Basic Skills	2001-2002	2009-2010	Change
Math - 8th Grade	72.0%	75.4%	3.4
FRL	52.2%	60.6%	8.4
Non-Poor	78.0%	83.6%	5.6
Race - White	74.0%	79.0%	5
Race - Hispanic	49.0%	59.0%	10
Race - African American	36.0%	48.0%	12

Source: *Rising to Greatness, 2011, Iowa Department of Education*

<http://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/217757/7-19-rising-to-greatness-final.pdf> accessed August 23, 2011

American College Testing (ACT) Program High School Test Results

The final test for most students as to their ability to graduate from high school and go to college or into the workforce is the ACT. The ACT was started in Iowa, at the University of Iowa, in 1959.¹² The headquarters remain in Iowa City and the company has grown into a multi-hundred-million-dollar business, set up as a non-profit enterprise, though this status has been questioned in recent years.

There are four sections,

English, Math, Reading, and Science. The total possible score is 36. Earning a 36 is a feat often – though not regularly – achieved by the brightest and hardest working students. Many high schools in Iowa and nationwide boast about the number of students they have each year that achieve a 36. Generally, a 30 or higher is considered a sign of academic excellence.

Only about 60 percent of high school students in Iowa take the ACT. Currently, nine states – Colorado, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, North Dakota,

“There is some improvement, but not enough.”

“We Must Find Common Ground,

“Low scores in science and math are consistent across the nation and within the state.”

Tennessee, and Wyoming – have recently begun to require all students to take the test, not just those who anticipate going to college. Jason Glass, Director of the Iowa Department of Education, has proposed that all students in Iowa begin doing so.¹³ Governor Branstad’s Education Reform proposal also calls for statewide testing of all Juniors. Currently, all students in the Des Moines Independent School District and the Clinton School District take the ACT.

In Iowa, in 2010, almost one-third of those taking the test meet or exceed the benchmark score in all four subjects. This is up from one of four in 2005.¹⁴

Those students who do not meet the benchmark score in a subject area, though their overall score may be sufficient to be accepted into academically strong colleges, are required to take remedial courses in that subject.

The math and science scores continue to be the weakest subject, as only one-third earn a 24 or better in science and one of every two do so in math.¹⁵ Low scores in science and math are consistent across

the nation and within the state.

Though the overall percent of test takers who score well in English and reading are substantially higher than the national average, at 77 percent (vs. 66 percent) and 61 percent (vs. 52 percent) respectively, the low science scores bring the overall readiness down to just above national averages.

Even districts which boast a large number of perfect 36s on the ACT, such as the Iowa City Community School District (ICCS) – where both the University of Iowa and the ACT headquarters are located – only have 62 percent of test-takers meeting the science benchmark score. And in the ICCSD, fewer than 50 percent of their African American students taking the test meet the benchmark in science, math, and reading.¹⁶

According to the ACT scores, only one-third of Iowa’s high school graduates – already self-selected for potential college attendance – are truly ready for college. This is reflected in the overall percent of adults 25 or older in Iowa who actually have college degrees, which is 25 percent of the population.

ACT Test Takers - College-Readiness Facts

	Test Category - Score Required for Readiness	Iowa		Nation	
		2005	2010	2005	2010
Students Meeting All Four ACT Benchmark Scores		26%	30%	21%	24%
College English Composition	English - 18	77%	77%	68%	66%
College Algebra	Mathematics - 22	48%	51%	41%	43%
College Reading	Reading - 21	59%	61%	51%	52%
College Biology	Science - 24	34%	37%	26%	29%
Population 25 years or older with college degrees			25%		28%

Source: *Rising to Greatness, 2011, Iowa Department of Education*

<http://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/2177577-19-rising-to-greatness-final.pdf> accessed August 23, 2011

How do we address these achievement issues? More money? More teachers? Smaller class sizes? Stop social promotion? Stop grade inflation?

Or do we let the parents and students choose which school is best for them? Do we let the free market of the best results get the business decide? Children's lives are wasting while we fight.

What Is "School Choice?"

Today, though the government monopoly of education is still strong, there are many options available to parents and students who are willing to look a little harder and push a little more to find a school that meets their needs. They, however, generally also have to be willing – like Rahm Emanuel and Chris Christie – to pay the bill. This is in addition to the property taxes and state income taxes they already pay to fund the government schools.

Schooling options are generally grouped together under the umbrella of "school choice" and include charter schools, vouchers and scholarships, tuition-tax credits, open enrollment, home schooling, dual enrollment, and on-line schools.

While some options are available under the current system, many are not. In order to make these options available to all children, irrespective of ability to pay privately, the government monopoly must be broken. All children deserve the chance to succeed.

Unfortunately, the state Department of Education Webpage does not provide much information about school-choice options. One may find information about specific programs such as charter schools, home schooling, and open enrollment, but there is

not one category which allows the parent or taxpayer to find all school-choice information.¹⁷

Additionally, the most effective program the state currently offers for actual school choice, the School Tuition Organization program, is not listed at all. Neither is there readily available information about the school expense tax deduction, available to all families. These are all critical parts of the educational picture.

School Tuition Organizations

In Iowa, the School Tuition Organization (STO) tax credit and scholarship program has been in existence on a limited basis since 2006, one of the earliest established nationwide. At that time Iowa, was a leader in innovative schooling options. Unfortunately, that is not true today.

STOs are 501(c)(3) non-profit scholarship groups that must spend 90 percent of the money they raise on direct tuition scholarships. There are 11 STOs in Iowa currently, serving over 60 accredited non-government schools, from elementary to high school.¹⁸

The students receiving the scholarships must be from families making less than three times the federal poverty level. The STO must offer scholarships to a variety of schools, not just one.

The schools must be accredited by the state of Iowa and follow federal Civil Rights Act standards.¹⁹ The STOs serve many types of schools, including elementary through high school, and including both religious and secular institutions.

In return for their donation to a STO, Iowa taxpayers receive a state tax credit. Though advocates for school

Children's Lives are Wasting"

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“We Must Find Common Ground, “School choice donors are continuing to support the program with their checkbooks, even during the recession. Over the past five years, over 36,000 scholarships have been awarded.”

choice lobbied for an increase in the maximum allowable tax credit awards, from \$7.5 million to \$10 million, the 2011 Legislature did not pass this increase, instead splitting the difference and passing an increase to \$8,500,000.

Individual taxpayers receive a 65 percent tax credit for their donation.²⁰ In 2010-2011, the actual donations to the STOs were almost \$11 million, so many of those donating their personal money, on top of their legally required local property and income tax payments, will still not receive a tax credit for their donation.

The table on this page and the next outline key information about the School Tuition Tax Credit Program.

In the last three years, the number of students receiving scholarships has increased from just over 7,500 to 10,208, an increase of 35 percent. The average dollar amount of each scholarship is just over \$1,000. All the tax credits available have been used, and it would appear that the increase to

\$8.5 million in tax credits will be fully used this year, with demand for more. School choice donors are continuing to support the program with their checkbooks, even during the recession. Over the past five years, over 36,000 scholarships have been awarded.

The cost of private school tuition varies widely, but at Regina High School in Iowa City the annual tuition is \$9,450. At the elementary level it is \$5,600.²¹ Not as much as at the University of Chicago Laboratory School, but still a substantial amount for a parent to pay on top of their tax burden.

Even with a \$1,000 scholarship, a low-income family must find a way to pay between \$4,600 and \$8,450 in tuition per child each year. This is between \$460 and \$845 per month for a 10-month school year.

For a four-member family, 300 percent of the federal poverty level is a gross income of \$5,588 per month, or just over \$67,000 per year.²² This is substantially less than the

**Iowa School Tuition Tax Credit Summary Information
2009-2010 and 2010-2011 School Years**

Total Tax Credits Allowed	\$7,500,000
Amount Allowed to Be Corporate	\$1,875,000
Total Donated 2010-2011	\$10,839,257
Individual State Tax Credit	65%
Number of STOs	11
Number of Schools Participating	140
Total Students Served 2009-2010	9,624
Total Students Served 2010-2011	10,208
Average Scholarship	\$1,184
Eligibility Requirements	<300% of federal poverty

Sources: "Iowa-Tax Credits for School Tuition Organizations,"

The Foundation for Educational Choice,

<<http://www.edchoice.org/School-Choice/Programs/Tax-Credits-for-School-Tuition-Organizations.aspx>> accessed on June 23, 2011.

"Hope for America's Children, School Choice Yearbook, 2010-2011," Alliance for School Choice,

<<http://www.allianceforschoolchoice.org/UploadedFiles/Home/School%20Choice%20Yearbook%202010-11.pdf>> accessed on June 23, 2011.

income either Rahm Emanuel or Chris Christie command. Lower-income parents choosing a private school are clearly dedicated to their child's education. We should all be so focused.

School Expense Tax Credits

Iowa offers a "Tuition and Textbook Credit" for any taxpayer with a child in school. The school may be either government or private, as long as it is accredited and non-profit. The credit is 25 percent of the "first \$1,000 paid for each dependent for tuition and textbooks."²³ This is available for both government and private schools.

Many parents many not realize they are eligible for this credit. It applies to fees and materials for required academic subjects, and includes extracurricular activities, drivers education fees, athletic costs, band, choir, orchestra, and speech costs.

Though the credit amounts to only \$250 per student, a parent should claim it if they are eligible.

Open Enrollment

Open enrollment is an area which Iowa parents make good use of. Though it currently applies only to enrolling in other government schools, many parents take advantage of open enrollment to send their children to their preferred schools.

The application deadline for open enrollment for grades 1–12 is March 1 of the previous school year. For new kindergarten students the deadline is September 1. These are hard and fast deadlines. All applications filed by March 1 must be approved. Those filed after may be approved, on a cause basis, if the application meets certain very specific criteria.

If you are interested in open enrollment – do not miss the deadline. Forms for the 2012-2013 school year are already available on the state Department of Education Website.²⁴

Unsurprisingly, the largest districts have the most open enrollment "out." While they also have some open enrollment "in," they are generally net losers of students.

The district losing the most as a proportion of their

Children's Lives are Wasting"

"Though the credit amounts to only \$250 per student, a parent should claim it if they are eligible."

Iowa School Tuition Organization Program History

Tax Year	Program Tax Credit Cap	Tax Credits Used	Total Scholarships Distributed	Number of Students Receiving Scholarships	Average Scholarship Amount	Percent Increase in Students Served	STOs Maxing out Tax Credits Available
2006	\$2.5 million	\$2,500,000	N/A	N/A	N/A		9 out of 9
2007	\$5 million	\$4,873,877	\$3,977,969	7,527	\$528	N/A	9 out of 10
2008	\$7.5 million	\$6,199,988	\$7,482,873	8,737	\$856	16.1%	6 out of 11
2009	\$7.5 million	\$7,404,135	\$9,226,072	9,624	\$959	10.2%	7 out of 11
2010	\$7.5 million	\$7,500,000	\$10,839,257	10,208	\$1,062	6.1%	12 out of 12
Totals		\$25,978,000	\$31,526,171	36,096	\$873		

Source: e-mail from Trish Wilger, Iowa Alliance for Choice in Education

August 22, 2011, "Update on Iowa/Legislative School Choice Issues"

“We Must Find Common Ground,

“While much district consolidation has occurred, a better approach would be for the larger districts to become smaller. If district size could be equalized, so that no district has over 5,000 students, there might be less ‘in’ and ‘out’ enrollment.”

population is Council Bluffs, which lost 581 students, or just over 6 percent. Statewide the total number of students “out” enrolling from their home district into another one was almost 25,000, from a total population of 473,494 students.²⁵

It is of special interest to note that 63 percent of Iowa’s 359 school districts are losing students and there are only 10 districts with over 8,000 students. In contrast there are 248 districts in the state with fewer than 1,000 students K-12.²⁶

While much district consolidation has occurred, it would seem that a better approach would be for the larger districts to become smaller.

If district size could be equalized, so that no district has over 5,000 students, there might be less “in” and “out” enrollment. Because the districts with the largest percent of “out” enrollment are the larger districts, with students presumably going to smaller districts, a reorganization of all districts to create more balanced sizes might be useful.

In addition, the Legislature currently allocates additional

funds to the small districts to subsidize their lower property tax income levels. This money might better be used on the overall education system.

Though the “choice” of open enrollment is working for many students, if the reasons for their decision – such as crowded classrooms and lack of personal attention – were removed, there could be an overall better result.

When a student open enrolls into another district, the state money used to teach them follows them to the new district. For the 2011-2012 school year, that amount is \$5,883, the state cost per pupil for the previous fiscal year.

The local property tax money remains in the home district. When a student open enrolls into another district, their parent becomes responsible for their transportation to and from that school. However, for low-income students, there is a transportation stipend of \$397 per student for up to three elementary students and one secondary school student.²⁷

The most negative aspect of open enrollment in Iowa is

Ten Largest Public School Districts, Comparison of Open Enrollment "In" and "Out" 2010

District Name	October 2008	October 2009	Difference	Percent Change	Open Enrollment Out	Open Enrollment In
Des Moines Independent	30,783	30,954	171	0.56	1,242	587
Cedar Rapids	17,502	16,930	-572	-3.27	861	431
Davenport	16,202	16,075	-127	-0.78	439	69
Sioux City	13,735	13,873	138	1	398	182
Iowa City	11,749	11,903	155	1.32	368	123
Waterloo	10,733	10,786	53	0.49	399	47
Dubuque	10,614	10,697	83	0.78	120	30
Council Bluffs	9,212	9,207	-5	-0.06	581	144
West Des Moines	8,842	8,858	16	0.18	488	506
Ankeny	7,948	8,343	395	4.97	228	92

Source: October 2010 Certified Enrollment, Iowa Department of Education

<http://educateiowa.gov/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2090>

accessed on August 29, 2011

that Expanded or Liberal Open Enrollment into an accredited private school is not allowed. While the parent and student have the choice of a better government school, they are still prohibited from enrolling in a private school unless they, like Rahm Emanuel and Chris Christie, can not only afford to pay their property taxes, but also pay the full tuition for a state-accredited private school.

There are 189 accredited non-government schools in Iowa; the majority of which are Christian, Catholic, Lutheran, or non-denominational. All grades were covered. There were 33,751 students enrolled in these schools in the 2010-2011 school year.²⁸

The most successful expanded or liberal open-enrollment program in the nation is that in Washington, D.C. The schools in Washington, D.C., have a long and troubled history of underachievement.

The program, first started in 2004, offered \$7,500 in scholarship money to 3,700 low-income students. Over 5,500 students applied for the program. The 3,700 were selected by a lottery method.

The money was to be used in the school of their choice, whether government or private, secular or religious. Ninety-one percent of the students in the program graduated from high school, compared to 60 percent from the regular government schools.²⁹

The average family income of students participating was \$25,000.³⁰ These children's families, unlike those at the University of Chicago Laboratory School could not afford school choice without the scholarships.

Unfortunately, President Obama was not a supporter of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program and last March

it was going to be cancelled.³¹ However, Representative John Boehner and others – both Democrat and Republican -- acted to reinstate the funding.

The funding was increased from \$13.2 million to \$20 million. Additionally, the amount of the scholarships was increased to \$8,000 for K-8 and \$12,000 for high school students.³²

In addition to the District of Columbia, there are nine states, or districts within those states, that offer a scholarship tuition program. Several are focused on special needs students. The states are Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Louisiana, Ohio, Oklahoma, Utah, and Wisconsin.

Indiana's program is considered the most far-reaching, as it provides 90 percent of state funding for scholarships for students whose families have income of up to 100 percent of the free and reduced lunch (FRL) amount. For families with incomes up to 150 percent of the FRL, 50 percent of state funding is provided.

These scholarships may be used at any school, government or private. The program is limited to 7,500 participants the first year and 15,000 the second year, but after three years the cap is to be lifted. They also joined Iowa in offering the education expense tax deduction.³³

In Ohio, the scholarship program student cap has now been raised to 30,000 and special needs children will receive 90 percent of the state money per student to be used at a school of their choice.³⁴

In Wisconsin, the 22,500 student cap on the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (reviewed in POLICY STUDY 11-3, "Monopolizing and Derailing the Education Freedom Train") has now been completely removed and the income

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eligibility limit has been raised to 300 percent of the federal poverty level.³⁵

The impact of these programs on our children’s learning will be intensively evaluated over the next few years.

Charter Schools

The Iowa charter school program is viewed nationally as very weak. In fact, Iowa earns an “F” from The Center for Education Reform (CER). They rank the Iowa charter school law as third weakest in the nation.³⁶ The other states earning an “F” grade are Kansas, Mississippi, and Virginia.

Under state law, the maximum number of charter schools allowed is 20, with seven charter schools actually functioning in 2011. According to CER, lifting the cap would not improve the situation as 1.) The schools are “charter” in name only; 2.) There is no autonomy – the schools report directly to local school boards; 3.) The regulatory and paperwork burden is designed to discourage participation; and 4.) There

is no dedicated funding at the state level – all funding passes through and is authorized or denied by the local school district from their current funds.³⁷

The top three American jurisdictions for charter schools are Washington, D.C., Minnesota, and California. They earned an “A” for having independence from standard oversight, for allowing all of the money allocated to educate a child to follow them to the charter school, and for encouraging true innovation.³⁸

In the 2011 legislative sessions, many states revised and improved their charter school laws. Chief among them was Maine, which is now allowing charter schools for the first time.

Tennessee and North Carolina both removed their caps on charter schools – previously at 90 and 100 respectively – compared to Iowa’s 20. Other states enacting new charter school legislation include Indiana, New Mexico, Florida, Wisconsin, and Illinois.³⁹

The focus of the high-school programs appears to

Charter Schools In Iowa

Name	Established	Grades	Number of Students
Des Moines Charter School	2010-2011	7 and 8	150
eSigourney Entrepreneurial Academy for Leadership (eSEAL)	2007-2008	7 through 12	197
Iowa Central Charter High School	2004-2005	10, 11, & 12	62
Northeast Iowa Charter High School	2005-2006	11 and 12	35
Panorama Community School District	2008-2009	10, 11, & 12	22
Prescott Elementary Charter School	2006-2007	PS - 5	267
Storm Lake Community School District	2005	10, 11, 12	89

Source: Charter and Innovation Zone Schools In Iowa Annual Report, January 2011, Iowa Department of Education, <http://educateiowa.gov/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=487&Itemid=1334> accessed August 29, 2011.

be on introducing students to college-level work while still in high school, with a focus on low-income and first generation college attendees. While the programs have had some success, the results appear inconsistent.

Only one school is an elementary, Prescott Elementary in Dubuque, Iowa. This school is presenting the most consistent data on their students' achievements. In tracking the three-year achievement increases, Prescott appears to be succeeding.

Fifty-two percent of their third to fifth graders have been attending the school for at least three years. Of the fifth grade students, 64 were "proficient" in reading. Fifty-two percent of fourth graders achieved a proficient or better score, and 78 percent of third-graders were proficient. The 23 students in the third grade class who have been at the school since kindergarten are the first class to have this experience. Their scores of 78 percent proficient are a positive indication of future success.⁴⁰

The Des Moines Charter School, focusing on at-risk middle school students, just opened in January 2011. They are operating on a year-round schedule, and fall 2011 classes began on July 18.⁴¹

They have received grants totaling \$250,000 from the Des Moines Community Foundation, as well as other donors, to support the efforts of the school to get started. Among other things, each child receives a laptop computer and is required to wear a uniform.⁴²

Competent Private Instruction or "Home Schooling"

The process for enrolling a child in "competent private

instruction" (CPI) or home schooling in Iowa is fairly straightforward. The parent must notify the home district by August 26, or 15 days after removing the student from the accredited school or moving to the district, of each school year.

If the parent wants "Dual Enrollment," which allows the student to participate in selected classes and programs, such as band, choir, or advanced science laboratory courses, they must apply by September 15, or 14 days after entering home school status.⁴³

The student must be tested each year to ensure adequate progress or must work under the quarterly supervision of a licensed teacher, or must prepare an extensive portfolio of their work. They may also submit a report card from an accredited on-line or distance learning school as evidence of work completed.

The standards for testing and demonstration of adequate yearly progress include testing above the 30th percentile on approved standardized tests in the various education subjects such as math, reading, social studies, and science.

Additionally, the student must test at or above grade level for their age and show six months of progress from the previous year's test scores.⁴⁴ If you are working with a licensed teacher these tests are not required.

If the child is not at school after age six, and the parent has not filed for CPI, a truancy violation may be filed.

The approximate number of home schooled children in Iowa is just over 13,000, according to a home school Website. This is only about 2.5 percent of the total students aged 5 – 17. This percent is comparable to that of other states with similar populations.

Children's Lives are Wasting"

"The process for enrolling a child in 'competent private instruction' (CPI) or home schooling in Iowa is fairly straightforward."

“We Must Find Common Ground,

“The three top reasons for home schooling are that parents want to provide religious or moral instruction (36%), followed by concern for the learning environment (21%), and dissatisfaction with the local schools (17%).”

As recently as 1980, home schooling was illegal in 30 states. Currently the estimate is that over 1.5 million students, and as many as 2 million, are home schooled. There was 7 percent growth in home schooling from 2007 to 2010, with an estimated 3 percent of children nationally home schooled. According to an *Education Week* article, it is no longer a “fringe” choice practiced by “head-in-the-sand reactionaries and off-the-grid hippies.”⁴⁵

The three top reasons for home schooling are that parents want to provide religious or moral instruction (36%), followed by concern for the learning environment (21%), and dissatisfaction with the local schools (17%).

Most families who chose to home school are white, religious, and conservative politically. The parents also tend to be well educated themselves, be middle-class economically, and have at least two children.⁴⁶

Though there is debate about the academic achievement of home-schooled students and education accountability, the children themselves liked it. When surveyed as adults, 95 percent reported that they were happy they had been

home schooled, and 85 percent intend to home school their own children.⁴⁷

Some who object to home schooling do so on the premise that “there is no way to assure that all home-schooled students receive a quality education.”⁴⁸ They do not believe there is enough accountability for the material students are taught and the qualifications of those (parents) doing the teaching.

As we have seen from the scores of the Iowa students on standardized tests such as the ITBS and the NAEP in the fourth and eighth grades and the ACT at the end of high school – apparently all government school students are not receiving a quality education, or at least are not learning enough to prove it.

Iowa Education Reform Efforts

Governor Branstad attempted to begin implementing education reform last spring with his proposal for using preschool vouchers instead of establishing blanket preschool statewide. The sky immediately began to fall and the rhetoric was very aggressive and nasty – both for and against the idea.

Number of Iowa Children Home-Schooled Compared to States with Similar Populations

State	Children Aged 5 - 17 Estimate	Number Home-Schooled Estimate
Utah	590,800	15,274
Mississippi	545,097	14,092
Iowa	506,340	13,090
Arkansas	504,077	13,032
Kansas	500,515	12,940
Nevada	476,723	12,325
New Mexico	357,167	9,234

Source: Numbers of Homeschoolers in the USA

<http://homeschooling.gomilpitas.com/weblinks/numbers.htm#how_many> accessed August 30, 2011.

The proposal failed and preschool will now be offered for “free” on a limited basis for all four-year-old children in all districts in Iowa. Mandatory school enrollment still does not begin until age six and ends at age 16.

The 2010 Certified Enrollment report shows that 19,800 of a possible 39,000 children were enrolled in state preschool last year, at a total cost of \$64.7 million dollars, or \$3,267 per child for only 10 hours per week of preschool.⁴⁹

This compares to the state cost of \$5,883 per student for regular K-12 full-time academic enrollment of about 40 hours a week. Therefore, on a per-hour basis, “free” preschool is significantly more expensive than “regular” education.

This is primarily because at the preschool level the number of children allowed to be cared for by each teacher is significantly less than a regular classroom with 20 or more students per teacher.

The Branstad program would have provided a \$3,000 preschool scholarship for four year olds. The scholarships would have gone to income-eligible families, at up to 300 percent of the federal poverty level, with a sliding scale. The same 10 hours a week would have been eligible. Under this program, the state appropriation would have been only \$43.6 million.⁵⁰

Though Iowa needs to have expanded or liberal open enrollment, possibly implemented by a low-income scholarship program, preschool was not the place to begin the effort, in this author’s opinion.

Currently, national scholarship programs are primarily designed to help low-income children who are struggling to learn in documented poorly performing schools. At the

preschool level there is no evidence of teaching and learning failure yet demonstrated, making it hard to advocate for the change.

Additionally, the Branstad proposal seemed unnecessarily complicated and difficult to understand and implement.

As stated before, most Iowans do not believe their children and schools, in general, are struggling – though ITBS, NAEP, and ACT data contradict that view of reality. Unfortunately, the fraction of Iowa schools on the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Schools In Need of Improvement (SINA) list is now at one-third and continuing to grow.

Hopefully, the focus at the July Education Summit on the real data will begin to make parents and taxpayers more aware, that, yes, their children, in their personal schools, are struggling. And that many children in those same schools are struggling to learn the information they need to succeed in college and as adults.

In particular, the Democrat members of the Iowa House of Representatives and Senate and the Iowa teachers union were strongly opposed to this proposal.

One key reason goes back to the continuing decline in the number of students in Iowa’s schools. If a community and district know their population is decreasing, and they know – intuitively – that their school is the focus of the area, a major employer and a center of community activity, any proposal which appears to reduce that focus and to take money away will be negatively received.

Additionally, as currently designed, the statewide voluntary government preschool program is available to any parent, not just low-income parents.

Rural, middle-class, and

Children’s Lives are Wasting”

“Most Iowans do not believe their children and schools, in general, are struggling – though ITBS, NAEP, and ACT data contradict that view of reality. Unfortunately, the fraction of Iowa schools on the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Schools In Need of Improvement (SINA) list is now at one-third and continuing to grow.”

“We Must Find Common Ground,

“Democrats for Education Reform (DFER) is a political action committee whose mission is to ‘encourage a more productive dialogue within the Democratic Party on the need to fundamentally reform public education.’”

blue-collar parents are probably some of the biggest users of the program. It allows mothers to work and not feel guilty about leaving the child with a babysitter and also frees up, through the government funding, another \$3,000-\$4,000 in the family budget that was being spent on childcare.

Though Iowa’s unemployment numbers are better than the national average, holding steady at 6 percent, and the agriculture sector is doing very well, the parents and workers in rural towns and school districts are still struggling and viewed this proposal as an attack on their viability and economic success.

The Governor’s preschool vouchers program was the wrong proposal, for the wrong program, at the wrong time. It was an unfortunate policy misstep.

Democrats for Education Reform

Though every Democrat member of the Iowa Legislature was opposed to the preschool voucher program, not all Democrats in other Legislatures in other states are opposed to the use of a scholarship or expanded open enrollment program to address learning failures. Neither are they opposed to the host of significant education reforms being proposed for government schools nationwide.

Democrats for Education Reform (DFER) is a political action committee whose mission is to “encourage a more productive dialogue within the Democratic Party on the need to fundamentally reform public education.”⁵¹

They support major reforms such as parental school choice, funding following the child, closing failing schools, open-

ing new charter schools, and increased teacher accountability. They think ideas such as mayoral control of urban school districts, educational flexibility, and state standards with local control have merit and should be implemented. They are willing to support reforms to tenure systems and merit pay for teachers.

Leaders of DFER base their support for these reforms on the premise that the Democratic Party was formed to “fight on behalf of our nation’s most vulnerable individuals.”⁵² The most vulnerable individuals, the ones who need and deserve our very best efforts, as Mayor Rahm Emanuel said, are our children.

They, like New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, believe that the education status quo must be challenged and that “tinkering” around the edges is not working and will not work.

They too believe that the education monopoly is derailing the education freedom train for low-income and minority students and that 50 years after *Brown vs. Board of Education* the continued failure of the government schools in teaching minority students is unacceptable. As the test evidence shows, in Iowa the government education monopoly is not only failing low-income and minority students but also the middle-class white children.

The DFER has chapters in California, Colorado, Indiana, Michigan, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Rhode Island, the state of Washington, and Wisconsin.⁵³

Unfortunately, Iowa does not have a branch of DFER, and the national organization indicated that no work was being done in Iowa. Many of these groups and Democrat Legislators have been influential in education reforms proposed by Republi-

can Governors, and they have offered both key support and valuable critiques of the proposals being debated.

A wide variety of education reform proposals and ideas are being discussed, both in Iowa and nationwide. They include all the options discussed in this POLICY STUDY and more. Some may work, some may not. What is clear is that what we are currently doing is not working.

What the DFER does not recommend is refusing to address the educational issues at hand. They do not recommend that Democrat Legislators refuse to work towards and find common ground with Republican Legislators and Republican Governors by opposing all reform proposals on a straight party-line vote.

They do not recommend continuing to do the same old thing, but just spending more money to do it.

Iowa Senate President Mike Gronstal and Democrat members of both the Iowa Senate and House of Representatives would do well to adopt such an approach before the next Legislative session.

We must find common ground, our children's lives are wasting. A straight party-line vote against anything and everything the Republican-controlled House of Representatives and Republican Governor propose will not work.

Above all, Democrats for Education Reform do not recommend dawdling while children's lives are wasting. In that they are in complete agreement with Governor Christie.

Membership in DFER is free – Iowa Legislators should sign up.

Children's Lives are Wasting"

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Reform] do not
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(Endnotes)

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**Public Interest Institute
at Iowa Wesleyan College
600 North Jackson Street
Mount Pleasant, IA 52641-1328**

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