

ARE BLACKS AGAINST SCHOOL VOUCHERS?

It has long been observed that the leadership in the African American community is frequently at odds with the rank-and-file it claims to represent. The subject of school vouchers is perhaps the prominent issue dividing the two strata.

The evidence that black kids do better in parochial schools than in public schools is overwhelming. It would seem on the basis of evidence that this would be a slam dunk for blacks: few would oppose school choice. The few, however, tend to be public officials.

A firestorm recently emerged in D.C. when Peggy Cooper Cafritz, president of the local school board, came out in favor of vouchers. Leading the charge was Eleanor Holmes Norton, the District's non-voting delegate to the U.S. Congress. Norton labeled Cafritz "unprincipled."

What motivates Norton is her unabashed fondness for the public school establishment, big government and unions. Of all the labels to choose, her selection of "unprincipled" to characterize Cafritz was downright disingenuous: by bucking the black establishment, Cafritz put principle over politics.

What's happening in Louisiana is similarly interesting. A major debate on school vouchers is taking place and blacks are in the thick of it. Governor Mike Foster is pro-voucher but he is being resisted by the public school establishment.

What do the people want? In a survey done of whites and blacks in Louisiana, 84 percent of whites and 89 percent of blacks supported school vouchers. That's 9 in 10 in the African American community. Yet their leaders want to deny them the exact choice that people like the millionaire Jesse Jackson have had (he sent his kids to private schools).

Before things change, black voters will have to change. They will have to start electing people who honestly and accurately reflect their sentiments and stop rubber stamping their so-called leaders who manage to get on the ballot box.