

# D.C. LOVES VOUCHERS

After years of debate, the District of Columbia now has in place the nation's first federally funded voucher program.

The beneficiaries of the program are almost all non-white: African-Americans, Asians, Hispanics and African immigrants make up 85 percent of the District's public school students. They may receive as much as \$7,500 a year for tuition and fees. All must come from low-income families.

It is a tribute to Catholic schools that more than half of the students have elected to go to one of the 22 schools run by the Catholic Church. A total of 1,011 students have been placed in 53 schools. Mayor Anthony A. Williams said, "The fact that so many families applied for and accepted these scholarships shows the demand for quality educational options."

It is no wonder families are flocking to Catholic schools. The public schools in D.C. are so bad that they have had five superintendents in nine years. Enrollment is down, and that is because more than 10,000 students have left for publicly funded charter schools. Violence in public schools is also endemic.

The voucher program gives priority to those students who have attended failed public schools. This is part of the Bush administration's No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The demand for vouchers has been greatest at the middle and high school levels.

Opposing school choice have been the teachers' unions and others committed to maintaining the near monopoly the public schools have enjoyed.