

# Vote on Jersey City Voucher Plan Nears

Giving parents the right to choose what school they would like to send their children to is an idea whose time has come. The most popular measure toward that end is the voucher program. If parents could present a voucher to any public, private or parochial school they chose, the net result would be to either make the poor schools better or to drive them out of business. Market discipline is what accounts for success in our economy, and the same principles that work well there could work well in the education industry as well.

Those who favor voucher programs will have their eyes fixed on Jersey City in October. Mayor Brett Schundler has risked a great deal of political capital in promoting vouchers, and if the vote in the Jersey City legislature fails, it would not bode well for him. But he seems confident that he will prevail. According to the Jersey City "Schoolchildren First" Education Act, the legislation would transform the school system as we know it. The legislation:

(a) Encourages a wide array of educational programs in governmental schools and provides financial assistance to families which would like to send their children to non-governmental schools, so that every child may have an expanded opportunity to be taught in the setting and manner which best helps that child learn.

(b) Replaces the bureaucratic regulation of a monopoly as a means of ensuring school accountability with competition, performance measurement, and disclosure, so that student success, not school sameness, becomes the focus of educational effort.

Predictably, the public school establishment is lined up

against the bill.

Unfortunately, an honest debate on the issue has not been forthcoming. The ugly specter of anti-Catholicism has been raised by at least one member of the Jersey City legislature. It has been said that the bill is designed to shore up support for the declining interest in Catholic schools. Leaving aside the fact that enrollment in Catholic schools is up, the fact remains that the real beneficiaries of the bill are the parents and children of all religions (and non-believers as well).

Competition among schools would certainly not hurt the good public schools. Competition rewards success and penalizes failure. By working so tirelessly against Mayor Schundler's effort, the public school industry, represented by unions like the National Education Association, is unwittingly issuing a failing report card to its own schools.

The real strength of Mayor Schundler's drive for school choice is that the program is confined solely to Jersey City. This way everyone who lives outside the area can judge for himself the effect of vouchers. If it works, other cities, if not states, will want to imitate the success. If it fails, so will the idea of school choice. The smart money says the odds are with Mayor Schundler. And the smart money says that a variant of the Jersey City plan will be coming to a school system in your area soon.