

VOUCHERS GAIN MOMENTUM

All across the nation the push for school vouchers is gaining momentum. While vouchers are resisted by the public school establishment, it appears that the unions can no longer hold back the tide. The people want choices and they are growing in numbers.

In New York City, where the public schools have long failed inner-city youth, the demand for vouchers is now being pushed by the corporate elite. Richard Cavanagh is president of The Conference Board, a group of corporate leaders. He recently surveyed 23 corporate titans on the subject of school vouchers. Nearly every one of them was in favor of some type of voucher plan.

Cavanagh discussed his findings with New York Schools Chancellor Joel Klein and Caroline Kennedy Schlossberg, the New York Department of Education's chief executive of strategic partnerships. Klein, however, says he still prefers charter schools for children. But it was clear that he was being pushed to do more than this.

Milwaukee, Wisconsin, is home to a successful voucher program, and now state lawmakers are seeking ways to expand the program. Critics of the voucher program say it is too expensive, especially at a time when Wisconsin (like all other states) is experiencing a budget crisis. But voucher supporters point to figures that show vouchers to be cheaper than funding public education.

Wisconsin spends \$4,917 per child in the public schools; the amount of the voucher is \$3,181.

Colorado is moving forward with an ambitious voucher program that may prove to be a model for the rest of the country. Led by Governor Bill Owens, who signed the bill in April, the new program will "literally open the door of opportunity to

thousands of our children.” The head of the local teacher education association said that the new opportunities for minorities represent “a sad day for our children.”

Perhaps the biggest breakthrough occurred in Washington, D.C., when Mayor Anthony Williams did a sudden about-face and announced his support for school vouchers. On May 1, Mayor Williams stunned activists on both sides of this issue when he said he was prepared to work with federal officials in seeking to expand school choice. He was immediately blasted by D.C. Delegate and former ACLU official Eleanor Holmes Norton. She accused Williams of “selling out.”

The one setback occurred in Louisiana where lawmakers up for election feared the wrath of the teacher unions and decided to effectively table the issue until after the election.

But for the most part, those who have sold out African American children—to the teacher unions—now have their back to the wall. The idea that black parents might opt to send their kids to a Catholic school remains a frightening thought to those wedded to the unions. Not everyone who is anti-voucher is anti-Catholic but too many are. Their days, however, appear to be numbered.