

## Civic Values in Public and Private Schools

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PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS evoke certain images in most people's minds. We tend to imagine private schools as elite, predominantly white, institutions for the affluent. Whatever their academic merits, private schools are not thought to provide experience or instruction that promote integration, tolerance, or public spiritedness, values we desire in citizens of a democratic country. Private schools are said to be separate institutions, serving families with separate values. Public schools, on the other hand, are imagined to be "the common school" envisioned by Horace Mann more than a century ago, mixing people of all races, classes, and origins. According to this vision, public schools take people from all backgrounds and make Americans of them, teaching tolerance and a commitment to the public good.

Although these perceptions of public and private schools are difficult to shake, the evidence is becoming clear that public and private schools are not what we imagine them to be. An analysis of data from the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) suggests that private schools are

Research assistance was provided by Brett Kleitz, Jongho Lee, and Nicole Mellow. Support for this project was provided by grants from the Program on Education Policy and Governance at Harvard University, the Public Policy Clinic in the Department of Government at the University of Texas, the University of Houston, the Bradley Foundation, and Larry Bernstein.

doing a better job than public schools of integrating students of different races, teaching them tolerance, and imparting a sense of public spiritedness. These analyses confirm and improve upon earlier work based on the High School and Beyond data set. The picture that is emerging from these data is that private schools are at least as capable as public schools of producing good citizens. Providing parents with public funds they can use to send their children to private schools is unlikely to harm our democratic values—and it may, in fact, strengthen them.

### The Theory

A system of universal, publicly operated schools was developed in the nineteenth century, in large part to ensure the dissemination of desired values to new generations of citizens. The debate in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, was primarily about whether education should be publicly financed and universally required, not whether schools should be government operated. With the notable exceptions of Thomas Paine and John Stuart Mill, who argued that the government should pay for education but allow families to choose who should provide it, most writers on the topic assumed that the government would run schools.<sup>1</sup> Thomas Jefferson, Alexis de Toqueville, Horace Mann, and John Dewey all emphasized the importance of universal education in promoting the civic values necessary for a successful democracy.<sup>2</sup> Motivated by the powerful arguments these thinkers advanced, and motivated in part by concerns about the civic values possessed by waves of primarily Catholic immigrants, universal public education became policy throughout the United States by the start of the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup>

Universal education has clearly produced benefits for U.S. democracy and productivity. The question is whether those benefits depend on government operation of schools to be achieved. Upon any investigation to answer this question, one quickly encounters a strong, emotional attachment to public education. People commonly report that they believe in public education, regardless of whether they actually send their children to public school (examples include President Bill Clinton, Vice President Al Gore, and many members of Congress).<sup>4</sup> People do not similarly say that they believe in the county hospital, even if they believe in universal access to health care. The government operation of schools has achieved its place in our secular faith in much the same way that the Constitution and the flag have.

To question the importance of government operation of schools in producing desired democratic values, therefore, verges on secular blasphemy. If *secular blasphemy* seems too strong, consider these comments from leading political theorist Benjamin Barber: "In attacking not just education, but *public* education, critics are attacking the very foundation of our democratic civic culture. Public schools are not merely schools *for* the public, but schools of publicness: institutions where we learn what it means to *be* a public and start down the road towards common national and civic identity. As forges of our citizenship, they are the bedrock of our democracy."<sup>5</sup> These sentiments were echoed recently by Secretary of Education Richard Riley in his response to school choice proposals:

Quality public schools are the foundation of a democracy and a free enterprise economic system. Therein lies the power of the American system of education—it is truly public. The "common school"—the concept upon which our public school system was built—teaches children important lessons about both the commonality and diversity of American culture. These lessons are conveyed not only through what is taught in the classroom, but by the very experience of attending school with a diverse mix of students. The common school has made quality public education and hard work the open door to American success and good citizenship and the American way to achievement and freedom.<sup>6</sup>

As can be seen, the level of emotional attachment to publicly operated schools is very high.

To pound the table and beat one's chest proclaiming that public schools benefit democracy, however, does not make it so. This claim requires empirical support. Do public schools actually produce students who are more publicly spirited than private schools? Are public schools really closer to the ideal of the common schools, with superior integration to that found in private schools? As we shall see later in this chapter, these claims are not supported by the evidence.

### *Democratic Values Are a Process, Not an Outcome*

There are, however, strong theoretical arguments for the importance of publicly operated schools in promoting democratic values. In her influential book *Democratic Education*, Amy Gutmann argues that one cannot determine the desirability of school choice in promoting democratic values based on the extent to which students in public and private schools possess desired values, or, as she puts it, "on consequentialist grounds."<sup>7</sup> She even concedes the empirical observation that private schools are better at teach-

ing what most of us would recognize as democratic values: "The evidence is scanty, but it suggests that private schools may on average do better than public schools in bringing all their students up to a relatively high level of learning, in teaching American history and civics in an intellectually challenging manner, and even in racially integrating classrooms."<sup>8</sup>

The difficulty with granting individual parents control over educational choices, Gutmann argues, is that we cannot know what democratic values we would like to see taught in schools until we have engaged in democratic deliberations about what those values are. "The problem with voucher plans," she writes, "is not that they leave too much room for parental choice but that they leave too little room for democratic deliberation."<sup>9</sup> The only way to ensure "our collective interests in the moral education of future citizens" is to leave the determination of education policy under public control instead of granting control to individual parents.<sup>10</sup>

In essence, Gutmann's argument seems to be that democratic values are whatever democratic processes decide—that is, unless they decide the wrong thing. To be fair, Gutmann is willing to allow a local school board to choose policies that are foolish "as long as the school board institutes nonrepressive and nondiscriminatory policies."<sup>11</sup> The trouble is that virtually all important school policies run the risk of being claimed to be either repressive or discriminatory. Does teaching a given set of values repress those students who do not share those values? Does failing to teach those values discriminate against the students who would want them taught? Any local school board decision of any importance to the democratic education of future citizens is going to raise questions about discrimination and repression.

If the democratic deliberations and processes of the local school board can be trumped when discrimination or repression occurs, who in Gutmann's opinion should review the actions of the local governing majority? The appeals process appears to go up and down. Above the local school board, national majorities and ultimately national judges monitor the repressive and discriminatory potential of local decisions. Below the school board, teaching professionals and their unions act as guardians of "non-repression" and "nondiscrimination."<sup>12</sup>

Since almost all decisions made by local school boards related to civic values raise questions of repression or discrimination and since the ultimate arbitrators of the validity of local decisions are unelected federal judges and unelected teaching professionals and their unions, the primacy that Gutmann at first gives to the outcomes of local democratic deliberation quickly shifts to the primacy of unelected elites judging the expected consequences

of local policies. Taken to its logical conclusion, Gutmann's view is rather undemocratic and relies heavily on consequentialist arguments. Her rejection of school choice because it involves too little democratic deliberation appears inconsistent with the frequency and ease with which the important decisions of local democratic deliberation could be overturned by unelected elites according to her idea.

In case the role of unelected elites seems exaggerated in my retelling of Gutmann's argument, notice that almost half of *Democratic Education* consists of arguments about the policies that local majorities either must adopt or cannot adopt. Local majorities cannot ban books, even to promote desired civic values. They can make decisions about adopting books for libraries and classrooms, but deciding whether books have been excluded because of legitimate limits on space or because of discriminatory or repressive reasons is a responsibility that ultimately belongs to unelected federal judges and teaching professionals.<sup>13</sup> Local majorities cannot decide to teach creationism, even if the decision is the product of democratic deliberation, because creationism represents a repressive imposition of religion on others. (Apparently this argument is stronger in Gutmann's estimation than concerns about the repression of excluding creationism from being taught to religious minorities who prefer this approach.)<sup>14</sup>

Local majorities, Gutmann argues, are obligated to take active steps to eradicate sexism by attempting to hire additional women administrators and by altering the content of their curricula.<sup>15</sup> They are also required to ensure equality of opportunity, meaning that they must "use education to raise the life chances of the least advantaged (as far as possible) up to those of the most advantaged."<sup>16</sup> Local majorities are also constrained in their democratic deliberations to promote racial integration in schools.<sup>17</sup> And, to ensure that these local majorities have the resources to meet all of these requirements, school funding should increasingly come from state and federal sources.<sup>18</sup>

What Gutmann advocates is not simply a process of democratic deliberation void of concerns about outcomes. In fact, it is clear that she really begins with outcomes, namely "nonrepression" and "nondiscrimination," and then allows for local democratic deliberation on whatever is left over. If the requirements of nonrepression and nondiscrimination are as constraining on local deliberation as they appear to be, the loss of some democratic deliberation in allowing school choice should hardly be worrisome as long as the goals of nonrepression and nondiscrimination are being met. In other words, it would be fair to assess school choice based on its consequences relative to these two goals and not reject it simply for

removing one layer of democratic deliberation. The choices of parents and the activities of schools could still be regulated in a school choice system by democratic majorities who would choose their regulations in a deliberative way to ensure nonrepression and nondiscrimination. In this way school choice could be allowed while still permitting democratic deliberation and some public control to achieve the goals of nonrepression and nondiscrimination.

### *Public Schools Encourage Political Participation*

A related concern is that public governance of schools teaches parents and other concerned adults about how to participate in a democratic process. The public school is the democratic institution in which more adults are likely to participate in some way than in any other institution of government. Giving parents vouchers with which they can alter education policies more easily by exiting a school than by participating in a democratic process to alter policies with voice might deprive parents of this important lesson in political participation. (*Exit and voice* are terms developed by Albert O. Hirschman.)<sup>19</sup> As one critic of school choice put it: "It is precisely because a public school system limits 'shopping' that it encourages parents to think like citizens. Since they are 'stuck' in a particular school district, they have very strong incentives to exercise their political skills to make it better. And, because it is a *public* school, they are guaranteed the right to exercise those skills."<sup>20</sup>

This is a somewhat peculiar notion of how to develop good citizens. Following this logic, it might be desirable to have the government produce a steady stream of frustrating policies to help citizens develop their skills in participating in altering those policies. Of course it is also possible that a steady stream of frustrating policies might alienate citizens, discouraging them from participating politically. Similarly, frustrating public school policies may alienate more than they cultivate political participation.

It should also be remembered that exit is an important way in which many citizens, especially advantaged ones, change their public school opportunities. Many people, especially those with sufficient resources, choose where they live based on the desirability of public school policies and outcomes. If those education policies turn out to be undesirable, those with means can move to other public school districts. In this sense some people are not stuck in public schools that force them to participate to improve the schools. Conversely, it should be remembered that many privately operated schools experience high levels of participation in the formulation and implementation of school policies. Simply because people

can exit private schools does not mean that voice is not available to them or even encouraged by the schools. In fact, many people may choose private schools precisely because they are more receptive to participation.

These are empirical issues. Do public schools actually solicit more participation from parents than private schools? Does any democratic benefit for parents come at the expense of the democratic values taught to students? Theory alone cannot determine the effects of public and private schooling on participation. Mark Schneider and colleagues have recently found that giving parents a choice about their children's education actually increases participation and enhances social capital.<sup>21</sup>

### *Choice Makes Consumers, Not Citizens*

A third argument against the democratic effects of school choice is that choice makes consumers, not citizens. Giving parents the ability to choose a school only encourages them to focus on self-interest at the expense of concern for the common good. As Jonathan Kozol put it: "[Choice] will fragmentize ambition, so that the individual parent will be forced to claw and scramble for the good of her kid and her kid only, at whatever cost to everybody else."<sup>22</sup> Public schools apparently restrain our self-interest and cultivate public spiritedness.

Like the other theoretical arguments, these claims ultimately depend on empirical support. One can know whether it is true that private schooling encourages selfishness while public schooling encourages altruism only by examining the evidence. None exists to support this claim. Even the logic of this argument is puzzling. Must there be a trade-off between being a consumer, or even being self-interested, and being a good citizen? The credit card balances of millions of Americans suggests that it is possible to be both.

Besides, many government benefits in other areas are provided by means of vouchers, with recipients acting as consumers. Medicare, for example, is essentially a voucher system for health care. The government will pay for a patient's triple bypass surgery, but the patient gets to choose the doctor, the hospital (public or private, religious or secular), and even to some extent the procedure to be used. Food stamps and rent subsidies are issued by similar voucher programs. The government pays for some housing and food, and the recipient chooses (within limits) what housing to take and what food to buy. Do we believe that medicare, food stamps, and rent subsidies encourage selfishness or undermine the common good by allowing recipients to be consumers? Would it be preferable on democratic grounds to require

that seniors receive health care in government hospitals from appointed doctors or that poor citizens be required to live in government-owned housing and eat in government-run soup kitchens? These scenarios seem absurd, but it is not clear how their democratic implications differ from requiring children to attend geographically zoned government-operated schools if they want to receive government-paid education.

### *A Theory of the Civic Value Benefits of School Choice*

There are no well-developed theoretical arguments as to why either school choice or privately operated schools should be desirable on democratic grounds. In part this is because school choice advocates have generally ceded this ground to their opponents. They either suggest that school choice raises democratic concerns, but these are outweighed by expected achievement gains, or they deny any public stake in the values taught by schools, arguing that school choice is purely a matter of parental rights. However, there are theoretical reasons for believing that private schools should be associated with more desirable civic values than public schools. There is not space to develop a full argument along these lines, but the following illustrates the tack that such an argument might take.

First, one might expect private schools to do a better job of teaching democratic values because they simply do a better job of teaching. Whatever qualities may make private schools better able to teach math and reading may also make them better able to teach the lessons of civics. By providing access to higher-quality private education, school choice may also provide access to higher-quality democratic education.

Second, privately operated schools may help develop important civic values, such as tolerance, by creating the strong identity and self-esteem that are frequently associated with greater tolerance. Private schooling and school choice allow parents more easily to raise their children with their preferred identities and values. Some critics point to this as evidence of the "Balkanization" that they fear private schooling could encourage. Curiously, authors sometimes express the advantage of public education in forging a "common national and civic identity" while at the same time stressing that "respect for our differences . . . is the secret to our strength as a nation, and is the key to democratic education."<sup>23</sup> Clearly it is desirable to enhance both national and particular identities. Enhancing national identity is not at odds with enhancing particular identity; in fact, considerable research on tolerance suggests that stronger self-esteem produced by a strong identity can be associated with greater tolerance for others.<sup>24</sup> If

one is comfortable with who one is, one is more likely to allow others to be who they are.

Private education and school choice is more likely than public education and lack of choice to contribute to stronger self-identities and self-esteem. Being able to choose a Catholic education makes it easier to have a strong Catholic identity. Access to a Jewish education is likely to contribute to a stronger Jewish identity. Blacks who seek an Afrocentric curriculum may develop stronger identities as African Americans. Not everyone is likely to choose schools that reinforce particular ethnic or religious identities. Many will choose schools that emphasize particular subject areas or that teach using certain techniques. Schools that emphasize the arts, for example, may reinforce people's identities as artists, and schools that emphasize Montessori methods of teaching may allow people to more strongly identify with other believers in Montessori approaches. The difficulty with some public education is that it is provided using a one-size-fits-none approach. Choosing a private education can allow families more closely to match needs, values, and identities with the offerings of various schools. By allowing students to feel better about themselves by giving them a clearer picture of who they are, private schools may produce students who are more likely to tolerate others than are public school students.

But when can students learn to be American? This is the wrong question for a number of reasons. First, it implies that there is a tension between being a good American and being a strong Catholic, Jew, African American, artist, or fan of Montessori approaches. This question bears a striking resemblance to the questions posed to John Kennedy about whether he could really be a good Catholic and a good president at the same time. Second, it implies that the development of a person's religious, ethnic, or other identity is something that should be done in one's spare time. It implies that at school students should learn neutral abilities or develop general identities as Americans. In the rest of their time (which is remarkably short relative to school) they can learn about their religious, ethnic, or other identities. Those matters are thought to be private and superfluous, like hobbies that people may indulge when otherwise not occupied. If we really believe in respecting our diversity, we have to allow people to develop their particular identities more than we would allow them to develop a devotion to fishing. If skeptics fear that there would then be nothing left to hold us together as a country, they need only look at the incredibly powerful homogenizing influences in our society, from fashion to entertainment to shared electoral institutions.

A third theoretical benefit of providing parents with the resources to choose a private education in terms of democratic values is that private schooling can transcend segregation in housing. Public schools draw their students from within politically shaped boundaries. Some of these boundaries were drawn to segregate people of different races and backgrounds,<sup>25</sup> but others, once drawn, encourage people to segregate themselves for fear of being on the "wrong" side of the line.<sup>26</sup> By attaching people's single largest asset, a house, to where their children go to school, public schools have made people even more cautious about mixing with other groups. People are afraid to buy a home in an area that would send their children to public schools with students of different backgrounds because the consequences of failure in their effort at integration extend beyond problems with education to a loss of value in their highly leveraged, single largest asset.

Private schools may help reduce this cautiousness about mixing by reducing the consequences of failure. If parents dislike the effects of integration they suffer only the inconvenience of finding a different school, not the financial blow of lower property values. Private schools may also provide overarching categories of association that may bridge racial and ethnic differences. Catholic schools may more easily mix students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds because they may share a common identity as Catholics. A private school devoted to emphasizing a certain subject or approach may similarly allow people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds to mix more easily because families can share their common devotion to that subject or approach. By basing the student mix on voluntary association rather than housing, private schools may make people more comfortable with integration. With better integration in private schools may come other civic values, such as tolerance.

Whether providing parents with public funds to choose private schools detracts from or promotes democratic values is not something that can be determined theoretically. The theoretical arguments against private schooling are not logically compelling and are even less persuasive given their lack of supporting evidence. And although the arguments in favor of the positive democratic effects of private education are plausible, they also require supporting evidence. Are private schools and their students actually characterized by higher levels of integration, greater degrees of tolerance, and a stronger commitment to the common good? These are the questions addressed in the next section.

## The Evidence

The evidence presented here focuses on four issues: racial integration in public and private schools, race relations and tolerance, volunteering and commitment to community, and general self-assessments of effectiveness in teaching civic values. The data are taken from the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS). This study was sponsored by the Department of Education and surveyed a representative national sample of twelfth graders in 1992. In addition, surveys were administered to the students' parents, teachers, and school administrators. NELS was not designed primarily to assess the values taught in public and private schools, but within the vast amount of information that was collected are a number of items that shed light on these issues. NELS has information on the racial composition of schools, some questions related to racial tolerance, and some items on volunteering activity and general public spiritedness. Some of the survey items measure the quality of civic education indirectly and imperfectly, but from all of the data it is possible to obtain a general picture of the democratic values taught in public and private schools.

### *Earlier Research on Integration in Public and Private Schools*

Evidence began replacing imagination of the nature of public and private schools with the collection and analysis of the High School and Beyond data set in the 1980s. Little information that directly measured students' tolerance or public spiritedness was obtained, but considerable data were collected on the integration of racial groups in public and private schools. Coleman and colleagues reported, based on the High School and Beyond data, that private schools, on average, educate a smaller percentage of minority students than public schools do on average. But they also found that the distribution of minority students in the private sector was less segregated than the distribution in public schools.<sup>27</sup> Greeley and Bryk and associates similarly reported lower average percentages of minority students in Catholic schools, which constitute the majority of all private schools, but better integration of those fewer minorities within the Catholic school system than in public schools.<sup>28</sup> Coleman and colleagues, Greeley, and Bryk and associates also observed better educational outcomes for minorities in private schools than for their public school counterparts. Coleman and colleagues further estimated that the racial and class integration within private schools would improve if economic barriers to private

school attendance were reduced via vouchers or tuition tax credits.<sup>29</sup> More recently Chubb and Moe examined data from NELS, which was the successor to High School and Beyond.<sup>30</sup> They found that private schools engage in less tracking and ability grouping, which improves the diversity of students within private schools and may improve educational outcomes for minority students.

These findings have been subjected to a variety of critiques. Braddock and Taeuber and James, for example, objected to the distinction that Coleman and colleagues made between segregation within public and private schools and segregation across public and private school sectors.<sup>31</sup> They argued that the fact that minorities within the private school sector are more evenly distributed than minorities in the public schools is more than outweighed by the fact that the average percentage of minority students educated by private schools is lower than in public schools. In aggregate, they argued, private schools contribute to segregation by acting as a haven for whites fleeing racially integrated public schools. Taeuber and James suggested that "segregation should be examined within specific administrative and geographic settings" rather than separately within public and private school sectors, taking the proportion of minorities in each as a given.<sup>32</sup>

The claims of Coleman and colleagues, Greeley, Bryk and associates, and Chubb and Moe that educational outcomes are better for minorities in private schools have been subjected to the same type of criticism as the more general claim that private schools produce better outcomes for comparable students than do public schools. Murnane, Goldberger and Cain, Willms, Alexander and Pallas, and Smith and Meier, among others, have argued that the apparent superiority of private school outcomes may be largely attributable to the selection of academically advantaged students for admission to private schools.<sup>33</sup> Attempts to control for known differences between the characteristics of students who attend public and private schools have been plagued by the possibility that unknown differences may have been producing the better outcomes in private schools. Recent evidence from the random assignment to public and private schools in the school choice experiment in Milwaukee, however, lends strength to the conclusion that the superior performance of students in private schools is not simply a function of the type of students in private schools.<sup>34</sup> Since the Milwaukee analyses involved only black and Hispanic students, these studies specifically supported the claim that minority academic achievement is better in private schools.

### *New Evidence from NELS on Integration in Public and Private Schools*

The debate on racial segregation in public and private schools during the 1980s stalled over a disagreement about the appropriate question to ask: Is it more important to focus on the distribution of racial and ethnic groups within the public and private school sectors or on the distribution across those sectors? Those who concentrated on the distribution within the public and private systems found private schools to be a positive force for racial integration. Those who focused on the distribution of racial and ethnic groups across the public and private sectors found private schools to be a hindrance to racial integration because of the shortage of minorities in those schools.

I have developed a measure of integration that avoids this dispute between within-sector and across-sector integration by rephrasing the question altogether. The more relevant question for measuring integration is this: Are private school students in classrooms that are more likely to be representative of the proportion of minorities in the nation than are public school students? If, on average, private school students have classes that more closely reflect the ethnic composition of the nation than do public schools, we can say that private schools are more integrated. Comparing the racial mix students experience in their classrooms to the mix nationally should identify any "white flight" across sectors while at the same time incorporating the important segregating effect of distribution within sectors.

Two variables addressed in NELS help measure the integration in public and private schools.<sup>35</sup> In 1992 teachers were asked to identify the number of minority students (black, Hispanic, or Asian) and the total number of students in their classes. Dividing the former by the latter gives the percentage of minority students in each class. This "classmix" variable is nice, because it measures the racial percentages of students in classrooms, not in schools. If, as Chubb and Moe (1996) argued, tracking students in public schools may segregate students within schools, measuring the racial composition at the school level may not accurately describe the more important experience of sharing classes with students of other races and ethnicities.

According to NELS, the national average percentage of minority students in twelfth-grade classrooms in 1992 was 25.6 percent. The average percentage of minority students in public schools was 26.2 percent, whereas the average proportion in private schools was 20.7 percent. From these numbers one might (falsely) conclude that public school students were in classes that had racial mixes that were more representative of the national average than were private school students. But by looking at the distribution

Table 4-1. *Distribution of Public and Private School Students in Classes with Different Percentages of Minority Students, 1992<sup>a</sup>*

<i>Percentage minority students in class</i>	<i>Public school students</i>	<i>Private school students</i>
0-5	32.2	26.0
5-10	13.9	12.4
10-15	8.8	9.6
15-20	7.9	16.5
20-25	4.5	5.8
25-30	2.9	11.1
30-35	3.0	3.2
35-40	2.5	3.3
40-45	1.7	2.3
45-50	2.8	1.4
50-55	1.0	0.4
55-60	1.4	0.4
60-65	1.1	0.8
65-70	1.3	0.8
70-75	1.7	0.3
75-80	2.1	2.3
80-85	1.1	0.2
85-90	1.8	0.6
90-95	2.3	0.1
95-100	6.1	2.6

Source: Author's analysis of data from U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *National Education Longitudinal Study*, 1992.

a. The national average of the percentage of minority students in classrooms is 25.6 percent. All analyses were performed using a sample weighted by the NELS variable F2CXTWT to ensure its representativeness.

of the percentage of minority students in public and private classrooms, it becomes clear that in 1992 private school students were more likely to be in integrated classrooms.<sup>36</sup>

As can be seen in table 4-1, 36.6 percent of private school students were in classrooms that were within roughly 10 percent of the national average percentage of minority enrollment. That is, more than a third of private school students were in classes in which between 15 percent and 35 percent of the students were of minority backgrounds. In public schools only 18.3 percent of the students were in classes in which between 15 percent and 35 percent of the enrollees were minority students. Private school students were twice as likely to be in these well-integrated classrooms as public

school students. And private school students were much less likely to be in highly segregated classrooms. More than half (54.5 percent) of public school students were in classes with fewer than 10 percent minority students or more than 90 percent minority students. Fewer private school students, 41.1 percent, were in these highly segregated classes.

It is possible to calculate the better integration in private schools more precisely. Taking the absolute value of the difference between the percentage of minority students in each student's classroom and the national average of the percentage of minority students, one can determine exactly how far the average public and private school student's classroom percentage of minorities was from the national percentage. The average public school student was in a classroom that was 25.1 percentage points away from the average national percentage of minority students, compared to 17.8 percentage points for the average private school student. That is, the percentage of minority students in private school classes tended to be 7.3 percentage points closer to the national average than the percentage in public school classes. The differences in integration between public and private schools in 1992 were large and statistically significant.

But perhaps this comparison is distorted by the fact that private schools are not evenly distributed across the country. Given that private schools are concentrated in urban areas, where there are more minorities, while private schools are scarce in rural areas, where there are fewer minorities, the distribution of private schools may skew the results. Public schools in rural areas should not be punished for the lack of minority students in their classes if there are few minority students in their areas. Nor should private schools be overly rewarded for attracting minority students in urban areas where many minority students are present.

As can be seen in table 4-2, however, even when the integration rates in public and private schools are compared in different areas of the country, private schools are still clearly better racially integrated. In northeastern urban areas, for example, the proportion of minority students in private school classes in 1992 was 13.9 percentage points closer to the average national percentage of minorities than the percentage of minority students in northeastern urban public school classes.<sup>37</sup> This significantly greater "representativeness" of private school classes is also seen when comparisons are made within northeastern suburbs, northeastern rural areas, midwestern cities, midwestern rural areas, western cities, western suburbs, and southern cities. In midwestern suburbs, western rural areas, and southern suburbs private schools were better integrated than public schools in those areas, but the differences are not statistically significant. Only in

Table 4-2. *Amount by Which the Percentage of Minority Students in Private School Classrooms Was More Representative of the National Average, by Area of the Country, 1992<sup>a</sup>*

Area of country	Amount by which the percentage of minority students in private school classrooms is closer to the national average than the percentage in public school classrooms	Significance $p <$
Nationwide	7.3	0.01
Northeastern urban	13.9	0.01
Northeastern suburban	7.2	0.01
Northeastern rural	13.5	0.01
Midwestern urban	18.6	0.01
Midwestern suburban	0.2	0.13
Midwestern rural	13.8	0.01
Western urban	18.1	0.01
Western suburban	11.6	0.01
Western rural	0.5	0.56
Southern urban	15.2	0.01
Southern suburban	1.5	0.53
Southern rural	-19.5	0.01

Source: Author's analysis of data from U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *National Education Longitudinal Study*, 1992.

a. All analyses were performed using a sample weighted by the NELS variable F2CXTWT to ensure its representativeness.

Table 4-3. *Racial Tolerance in Public and Private Schools, 1992<sup>a</sup>*  
Percent

Variable	Private (actual)	Public (actual)	Private (adjusted)	Public (adjusted)
Students who strongly agree that students make friends with students of other racial and ethnic backgrounds	31.2	17.6	29.2	18.0
Students who strongly disagree that fights often occur between racial or ethnic groups	64.3	28.6	60.6	27.1
Teachers who report that racial conflicts among students are not a problem	64.6	39.5	64.2	40.2
Administrators who report that racial conflicts among students are not a problem	73.0	54.9	71.1	55.5

Source: Author's analysis of data from U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *National Education Longitudinal Study*, 1992.

a. All differences between public and private school results are significant at  $p < .01$ . The adjusted results are derived from a logit regression that controls for students' socioeconomic status and the racial composition of the class. The coefficients for these models are available from the author upon request. All analyses were performed using a sample weighted by the NELS variable F2CXTWT to ensure representativeness.

Students, teachers, and school administrators were also asked about the extent of racial conflicts in their school. The results show a dramatically greater degree of racial tolerance in private schools.<sup>38</sup> Almost a third (31.2 percent) of private school students strongly agreed that students made friends with students of other racial and ethnic groups in their schools, compared to 17.6 percent of public school students (see table 4-3). Controlling for the socioeconomic status of the students and the racial composition of the classes did not alter these results.

With regard to the extent of racial conflicts, the differences between public and private schools were even more striking. Almost two-thirds of private school students (64.3 percent) strongly disagreed that "fights often [occurred] between racial or ethnic groups," while only 28.6 percent of public school students strongly disagreed with this statement. Teachers were also asked to rate how serious a problem "racial/ethnic conflict among students" was. Among private school teachers, 64.6 percent reported that racial conflict was not a problem versus 39.5 percent of public school teachers. When school administrators were asked the same question, 73.0 percent of those at private schools reported that racial conflict was not a

the rural South were private schools less well integrated than public schools. The white flight to private schools in the rural South that has been used by many to suggest that private schools undermine integration appears to have been the exception, not the rule. Even in the rural South private schools are less well integrated because they have concentrations of too many minority students, not too few. Throughout the rest of the country private schools are better able to produce a racial mix in classrooms that is closer to the national percentage of minority students than are the public schools in their areas.

### *Racial Tolerance in Public and Private Schools*

We might all hope that schools not only mix people of different backgrounds, but also improve the tenor of relations between groups. NELS asked a series of questions of students, teachers, and school administrators that addressed this issue. Students were asked whether students at their schools made friends with students of other racial and ethnic groups.

problem compared to 54.9 percent of public school administrators. None of these results are altered by introducing controls for socioeconomic status and racial composition, and all of the differences are statistically significant. Private schools not only do a better job of racial integration, but appear to be doing a better job of achieving the racial tolerance that we hope comes with integration. In 1992 students, teachers, and administrators consistently reported that private schools were better able to form cross-racial friendships and avoid racial conflicts than public schools.

### *Volunteering and a Commitment to Community*

We have seen that private schools are better integrated and characterized by greater racial tolerance, qualities that describe the inner workings of the schools, but how well do they relate to the communities in which they reside? Are they insular havens of an elite, or are they committed to working for the public good? Based on the responses students gave in NELS on questions about volunteering, it seems that private schools are characterized by strong public spiritedness.

Students were asked whether they had engaged in any "unpaid volunteer or community service work" in the past two years. Almost two-thirds (63.2 percent) of private school students had, compared to fewer than half (45.6 percent) of public school students (see table 4-4). Even after controlling for socioeconomic status, the gap between public school and private school volunteering remains unchanged. Private school students not only reported that they were more likely to volunteer, but they were more likely to volunteer more often. More than a third (34.3 percent) of private school students said that they volunteered at least once a week, whereas about a tenth (10.2 percent) of public school students said that they volunteered that often.

These differences are not produced by socioeconomic status. There is something about private schools that is associated with more volunteering. It is possible that more private school students volunteer because they are required to do so by their schools. Although it is true that 15.5 percent of the private school students and 13.4 percent of public school students who volunteered reported that they did so because it was required, this difference is small, even if statistically significant. On the other hand, the results do not tell how many students were required to volunteer by their schools; they tell only how many said that their volunteering was caused by a requirement. Perhaps private school students have internalized the lesson and believe that they would volunteer even if it were not required. It is also

Table 4-4. *Volunteering and Commitment to Community in Public and Private Schools, 1992<sup>a</sup>*  
Percent

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Private (actual)</i>	<i>Public (actual)</i>	<i>Private (adjusted)</i>	<i>Public (adjusted)</i>
Students who have volunteered in the last two years	63.2	45.6	61.7	41.4
Students who volunteer at least once a week	34.3	10.2	31.3	9.6
Students who report that they volunteer because it is required	15.5	13.4	17.3	13.7
Students who say that it is very important to help others in the community	36.2	32.6	36.7	31.7
Students who say that it is very important to volunteer	47.2	34.8	47.1	34.7

Source: Author's analysis of data from U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *National Education Longitudinal Study*, 1992.

a. All differences between public and private school results are significant at  $p < .01$ . The adjusted results are derived from a logit regression that controls for students' socioeconomic status and race and the racial composition of the class. The coefficients for these models are available from the author upon request. All analyses were performed using a sample weighted by the NELS variable F2CXTWT to ensure representativeness.

possible that volunteering is taught at private schools by example rather than by requirement. If this is so, initiatives to require community service in public schools, like the one recently adopted in Chicago, may fail to achieve their goals if not implemented in the proper context.

The greater degree of volunteering in private schools also seems to be yielding a greater commitment to community and to helping others. When asked to rate how important it is to help others in the community, 36.2 percent of private school students said that it is very important, compared to 32.6 percent of public school students. On the importance of volunteering, 47.2 percent of private school students said that it is very important versus 34.8 percent of public school students. These differences are statistically significant and persist even after controlling for students' race, their socioeconomic status, and the racial composition of the school. It appears as if the reinforcement of particular identities that characterizes many private schools does not come at the expense of commitment to others. Private school students are more likely to volunteer, more likely to volunteer often, and more likely to believe that volunteering and helping others are very important things.

### General Self-Assessments on Teaching Democratic Values

In addition to information on integration, racial tolerance, and volunteering, NELS asked school administrators to rate how well their schools promote certain goals compared to other schools. In particular, administrators were asked how well their schools promote practice in citizenship, how well they promote awareness of contemporary social issues, and how well they teach values and morals compared to other schools. On promoting citizenship, 29.3 percent of private school administrators gave their schools "outstanding" ratings versus 17.3 percent of the public school administrators (see table 4-5). The results were similar when administrators were asked how well their schools promote awareness of social and contemporary issues. Private school administrators gave their schools an outstanding rating 25.6 percent of the time, whereas public school administrators rated their schools outstanding 17.0 percent of the time. The most striking difference between public and private school self-assessments can be seen in how well the administrators said their schools teach values and morals. Nearly three-quarters (71.8 percent) of private school administrators rated their schools outstanding in teaching values and morals compared to only

Table 4-5. *Administrators' Self-Assessments of Schools' General Effectiveness in Teaching Civic Values, 1992<sup>a</sup>*

Variable	Private (actual)	Public (actual)	Private (adjusted)	Public (adjusted)
Administrators who rate their schools as outstanding in promoting citizenship	29.3	17.3	30.1	17.5
Administrators who rate their schools as outstanding in promoting awareness of contemporary and social issues	25.6	17.0	28.6	17.0
Administrators who rate their schools as outstanding in promoting teaching of values and morals	71.8	11.1	73.6	10.9

Source: Author's analysis of data from U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *National Education Longitudinal Study*, 1992.

a. All differences between public and private school results are significant at  $p < .01$ . The adjusted results are derived from a logit regression that controls for students' socioeconomic status and the racial composition of the class. The coefficients for these models are available from the author upon request. All analyses were performed using a sample weighted by the NELS variable F2CXTWT to ensure representativeness.

11.1 percent of public school administrators. Although many political theorists are convinced that public schools do a better job of providing civic education, the public school administrators seem not to be so confident. According to the people who actually run the schools, private schools offer a superior democratic education to that offered in public schools.

### Conclusion

Having some evidence is a considerable improvement over speculating or making assumptions about the implications of public and private education for civic values. But the evidence from NELS does not necessarily address all of the questions we would like answered, and even the ones that are answered may not be answered in the way we would prefer. NELS did not provide information on the long-term political effects of public and private education on civic values, because the subjects have only recently graduated high school. NELS did not ask the commonly accepted questions developed by political scientists to measure tolerance, trust in government, and social capital. The questions that NELS did ask often relied on self-assessments that may have been biased.

Is it possible that the results presented here are simply the product of systematic differences in how public and private school respondents answer questions? On the issue of racial integration, the information is not subject to a self-assessment bias. The proportions of minority students in public and private classes were what they were. On the reporting of cross-racial friendships, racial conflicts, volunteering behavior, and general effectiveness in teaching democratic values, bias is a greater concern. But there is no reason to believe that private school respondents consistently overrated activities in their schools or that public school respondents underrated them.

In fact, it appears as if public school administrators may have misrepresented their schools more than private school administrators. On the questions related to racial conflicts, for example, the responses given by private school students, teachers, and administrators were very consistent with each other, but public school students, teachers, and administrators were not consistent with each other (see table 4-3). Private school students strongly disagreed that racial fights occurred often 64.3 percent of the time. Similarly, two-thirds of private school teachers reported that racial conflict among students was not a problem. Although private school administrators saw even fewer racial conflicts, with 73.0 percent saying that they were not

a problem, the differences between the responses from students, teachers, and administrators in private schools were small.

In public schools students, teachers, and administrators told very different stories about the extent of their racial conflicts. Only 28.6 percent of public school students strongly disagreed that racial fights often occurred in their schools. Public school teachers, however, saw fewer racial problems than their students, with 39.5 percent reporting that racial conflicts were not a problem. Public school administrators saw even fewer racial problems than the teachers did, with 54.9 percent reporting that racial conflicts were not a problem in their schools. It seems reasonable to infer from the inconsistency of the results from public school respondents and the consistency of results from private school respondents that public school administrators are either more out of touch with what is happening in their schools or more likely to underreport their problems than private school administrators.

It is therefore plausible that the higher ratings private school administrators gave their schools for teaching citizenship, awareness of contemporary issues, and moral values may actually understate the superiority of the democratic education in private schools. The credibility of the high rating that private school administrators gave their schools for teaching moral values is further enhanced by the similarity of this result to the high ratings that parents in Cleveland gave to their private choice schools (see the chapter by Greene, Howell, and Peterson in this volume). The consistency of all of these results suggests that we should take seriously the self-assessments which show that better civic education is provided in private schools.

But it is still reasonable to worry about whether the stronger democratic values associated with private schools will translate into stronger democratic values for students who would choose private schools under a voucher system. Perhaps the superiority of the values in private schools is a function of the students who are in private schools, not the education actually provided by the schools. However, the fact that controlling for socioeconomic status and racial composition of the schools makes little difference in the results suggests that the better values in private schools are not simply a product of the students who are in those schools. Besides, the idea that students select a private education because they have superior democratic values contradicts the standard indictment of private school families as elitist, separatist, or extremist. The best way to determine more definitively whether private schools produce more democratic students or simply attract more democratic students is to conduct randomized experi-

ments in which identical populations are assigned to public and private schools and their values are measured over time. Happily, randomized school choice experiments are underway in Dayton, New York, and Washington, D.C., that should permit precisely this type of study.

The evidence from NELS suggests that there is no reason to fear that school choice programs will undermine democratic education by allowing more students to choose private schools. There is even good reason to believe that school choice programs may improve democratic education as well as educational achievement.

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## FIVE

## Policy Churn and the Plight of Urban School Reform

Frederick M. Hess

We had the bad news [superintendent] for . . . 51 weeks. He had a reputation as a boy wonder. Anybody in [this district] will tell you how he wrecked a good organization. . . . The superintendent poisoned the relationship with the teachers and the administration. His first thing was, "I'm not going to change anything." That lasted 10 days. For the next 50 days, and I counted this, a major change was made every day. I'm not kidding. . . . As bright and as quick as he was, he was so impulsive it was unbelievable. He didn't think about culture or what people do. He just came in and knocked around. . . . He's now superintendent of [another district]. . . . He's got the ability to get a job, but not to keep a job.

—A senior school administrator interviewed in 1995

CRITIQUES OF URBAN SCHOOLING invariably start with the presumption that urban public school systems are in a state of crisis, and end with clarion calls for more change and new "solutions." The disagreements begin when the critics start to debate which remedies are most likely to improve urban school performance. Perhaps the predominant dispute in contemporary education policy is the one between the advocates of choice-based remedies and those who oppose choice-based approaches. Like other disputes about

This chapter draws upon Frederick M. Hess, *Spinning Wheels: The Politics of Urban School Reform* (Brookings, 1998).