

“Choice” Reform: Dollars, Disasters and Databanking

Part 2 of The “Choice” Charade

Reform Drives Profits

Former U.S. Education Secretary William Bennett might have set up his entire K12 operation as a private curriculum publisher in the homeschool venue. But K12 isn't a simple curriculum vender. Students' parents must enroll them in K12, because K12 is an online academy. At up to \$1200 per pupil, per enrollment, per year Bennett could have easily realized profits. Based upon his well-cultivated image as Mr. Virtues, he could have made a decent income by enrolling a portion of the estimated 1.5 million homeschoolers nationwide. He could have fashioned an untarnished image as a benevolent godfather to homeschooling.

But Bennett has grander plans. Personally, he has decided to go for the more lucrative cybercharter income – straight from the public treasuries, a surefire way to anger public education proponents (a group he repeatedly insults with the moniker of “the blob” in his discourses on public education). Professionally, he has seized upon a theme he embraced during his earliest days in the “bully pulpit” as Secretary of Education – “standards” and “accountability,” an education reform agenda antithetical to homeschooling rights. Strategically, Bennett's K12 is standing to benefit significantly from the well-heeled political connections of its founder:

Bennett says there is nothing specifically in President Bush's education plans that will benefit K12 – although, if vouchers, increased funding for charter schools, and educational savings accounts become law, as Bush proposes, the company could be on the receiving end of federal cash. But Bennett, who would not reveal how much is being paid by K12, believes the Bush Administration's focus on annual testing and accountability can only benefit his online enterprise. “That's because, at the end of the day, people will say, ‘O.K., we're for standards, we're for outcomes,’” Bennett predicts. “And then they will ask: ‘Now how do we get there?’” Bennett, of course, hopes K12 will be part of the answer. (“Bill Bennett: The Education of an E-School Skeptic,” by Alexandra Starr, *Business Week*, 2/14/01.)

...K12's creators remain hopeful that an assortment of tax credits, educational savings accounts and charter school mechanisms will eventually allow parents of any income level to afford their programs. (“A New Enterprise Joins Growing Community of Online Schools,” by Margaret W. Goldsborough, *NYT*, 1/24//01)

Last summer U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige embarked on a cross-country tour promoting the federal *No Child Left Behind Act*. On a stopover in Colorado at a forum on e-learning, which featured Bennett's Colorado Virtual Academy, Paige touted the fact that “\$700 million is available to states and schools in 2002 through the Enhancing Education through Technology program, along with \$2.25 billion through the E-rate

initiative” (<http://www.nclb.gov/media/news/071202.html>). This is in addition to hundreds of millions of federal dollars for charter school expansion and development.

Indeed, Bill Bennett’s K12 Virtual Academy cybercharters have all appearances of becoming a financial windfall. His start-up costs include a loaned computer, curriculum, a teacher overseeing up to 40 pupils, and a few other items of nominal expense. Estimated expenses run between \$1500 and \$2500, depending on a number of factors. His profit is considerable. An alert issued by the OHIOEANDA (Ohio Equity and Adequacy of School Funding) entitled “Bill Bennett Strikes Gold in Ohio” (9/11/02) spells out the details:

According to the Department of Education website, Bill Bennett’s Ohio Virtual School received \$398,347.04 in September based on an annual amount of \$3,983,470.39. The annual amount along with the monthly payments will change as Bennett enrolls more students.

Some information and implications regarding this enterprise are:

1. Bennett told a nationwide TV audience (Fox News Network) last year that the cost of Virtual schooling is \$895 per student.
2. Bennett’s Ohio Virtual School will possibly provide up to \$1500 worth of instructional materials and services to students. Ohio taxpayers will pay Bennett on average more than \$5000 per student. These payments are deducted from Ohio school districts.
3. Most of the money collected by Bennett will not contribute to Ohio’s economy. His operation is based in Virginia.
4. Bennett appears to have strong political ties to those who control Ohio’s purse strings. No doubt any changes in Ohio law regarding charter schools will provide additional benefits to the Bennett-type operations.
5. The home schooling community is seriously divided over Bennett’s tactic of targeting home schoolers.

The state of Ohio, which is far ahead of the rest of the country in “choice” implementation (charters, cybercharters and vouchers), provides a good window into the profits that can be made. As of January 2003, the Ohio Department of Education reported that Bennett’s Ohio Virtual Academy received \$5,334,896.27 for the 2002 -03 school year with a claimed enrollment of 1004. This enrollment is a 23.8% increase from October, 2002. Therefore, the average pupil funding is \$5,314. And this figure doesn’t include the \$500,000 start-up funding available to all charter schools in Ohio in the first few years, \$50,000 from the state and \$450,000 from federal funds. Nor does it include federal grants for budget line items such as “classroom size reduction,” an irony available to an “e-classroom” of one person in the family room.

Bennett is not apologetic about the profits, even if they do come out of government coffers.

Bennett answers critics who worry about profit motive in the K-12 educational system emphatically, "I am in favor of anything that works. I don't think that profit motive is something to be afraid of. I recently gave a speech to a group of executives from a top auto company, and as I talked with them, the thing they kept focusing on was customer satisfaction. At the heart of customer satisfaction was giving their customers what they wanted – the very best performance and service available. Being customer-oriented means tremendous flexibility. We should have that in the classroom and throughout the nation's education system. ("William Bennett: Education Philosopher," by Stefanie Sanford, 9/01, <http://www.convergemag.com>)

Profits and politics aren't the only issues of relevance. Bennett backed "choice" while he was the U.S. Secretary of Education, a key cabinet position during the Reagan administration. During the next decade he trumpeted "choice" from his various positions on think tanks and public policy institutes. He wrote books and made speeches which promoted "choice." All of this could be viewed as "insider trading" -- meaning that Bennett stands to profit directly from his prior pro-"choice" advocacy, and will continue to profit as an outcome of his political connections. However, less known, but certainly well-documented, is the fact that Bennett has consistently been one of the nation's foremost cheerleaders for education reform. "Choice" is a key element of systemic education reform plans. Part 3 of this report will demonstrate that Bennett's personal venture into "choice" has much to do with his ambitions to further the education reform agenda. In fact, Bennett's cybercharters are the perfect vehicle to leverage key elements of education reform.

Cybercharters are pushing the limits on many fronts. They are riding the crest of the rapidly burgeoning e-school initiatives, propelling high-tech ventures into the potentially profitable education markets. They are deliberately altering the meaning of "homeschooling," a term with legal status, by broadening its association to include public e-schooling. And, cybercharters are redefining "public" education to include partnerships, hybrids, blended, dual and other homogenizations of public and private. A recent "blended" school project from Oskaloosa County Florida, which claims to be a model for the nation, is creating "a seamless educational plan for two groups of students: those that are schooled at home and students that are schooled at 'government schools' (public schools)." The project pivots on a purposefully expanded definition of homeschooling: "an alternative form of education in which school-aged children primarily learn at home, under the supervision of their parents, rather than in a traditional school." (Ishizuka, 2000, p.4)." Broadening the definition of a term to include the opposition can be a highly effective political ploy to engineer change. Indeed, this new "third choice" pilot program intends to lobby for substantive legislative changes which will irrevocably alter the legal parameters of homeschooling and push the boundaries on public "options."

Charter schools unabashedly take money away from public schools and transfer it to private for-profit or non-profit corporations. This fact alone wreaks havoc on district budgets. Cybercharters do not have the overhead expenses and start-up costs that accompany the “bricks and mortar” charters, of which Edison is the most notable, yet in most instances they receive the same amount of money per pupil. Therefore, cybercharters stand to make quite a bit more profit than a traditional charter school. A statement by Tom Mooney, President of the Ohio Federation of Teachers on behalf of the Coalition of Public Education (8/29/02) voices concerns:

...Advocates have been all too successful in spreading the myth that charter schools are autonomous, community based schools offering unique instructional programs. In fact, the field is increasingly dominated by corporate chains offering cookie cutter curriculum with profit rather than proficiency as the primary motive. The profit margins in the corporate run virtual schools are particularly obscene.

Cybercharters are cash cows. The battle is already furiously raging over who will get the moneys. More money can be made by setting up cybercharters than “bricks and mortars,” and school districts that formerly opposed high-tech computerized education are now rushing to stand in line for the lush moneys. A recent news account illustrates the magnitude of this revolution in education:

Three western Ohio school districts are considering whether to convert all of their schools into charters schools in hopes of being entirely funded by the state. The state pays all \$4,949 per-pupil spending for charter school students, but traditional public schools use local property taxes to pay a portion of that basic aid for students. (<http://www.onnews.com/story/php?record=22586>)

Charter schools of all types – public, private, profit, non-profit, blended, hybrids, etc. – are currently on the receiving end of a literal flood of state, federal and private dollars.

Breaking the Mold

By design, charter schools “break the mold” of traditional education. In 1991 the U.S. Department of Education released its *America 2000* education reform plan, which was the vanguard thrust towards achieving national education reform goals. The Bush Sr. administration, led by Secretary of Education Lamar Alexander, proposed that **“the definition of public schools be broadened to include any school that serves the public and is held accountable by a public authority.”** State and federal legislation since that time has opened the door to new experimental “choice” models such as magnet schools, pilot schools, charters, and other experiments with a multitude of descriptive names.

It is important to note that this definition of “choice” is *public* education, and does not include private or homeschool choice. Public “choice” is best exemplified by the contrived choice of chocolate cake served on a blue plate vs. chocolate cake served on a red plate.* With the implementation of each new facet of education reform, there is a significant erosion of true choice. For example, private schools take a blow toward

maintaining autonomy when they are legislatively required to administer high-stakes, state-mandated testing. Adherence to state standards and curriculum alignment to state assessments is characteristic of government school “choice.”

By design, “choice” schools are set up in such a way that they are several times removed from citizen voter accountability or oversight. There are “sponsors,” “authorizers,” “Educational Management Organizations” (EMOs) and other private and/or governmental entities that constitute a new governance structure. Some pro-charter arguments have held that parents would have direct input into their child’s education (so-called “choice”). In fact, citizens have to go through a labyrinth of bureaucratic hoops to make simple requests for public information.

The time-honored structure of education in America guaranteed that parents and local citizens elected a school board which was directly accountable to them for the education of their children. Since the early 1980s, with the advent of education reform measures, this representative form of government has been systemically dismantled. The role of school boards has changed with the passage of state and federal legislation. Traditional pathways for parental and citizen accountability have been restructured, so that what happens in the classroom is decreed from on high, not by local elections or teacher conferences. Site-based management structures have gradually replaced the role of school boards in matters such as curriculum decisions.

School districts on academic “watch” discover that the state now runs their daily operations. And the term “accountability” no longer means “accountable to the taxpayer.” In education jargon it has been redefined to mean student performance on assessment tests, which is the basis for evaluating student, teacher and school performance. “Transparency,” a new buzz word, means that “report cards” are publicly issued for each district, indicating performance on the assessments.

The Intentional Design Flaw

From the earliest days of education reform plans, charter schools and other “choice” experiments were designed to be unencumbered by the restraints placed on public schools so that they could be free to “innovate.” In order to create an environment where this creativity would not be stifled, reformers insisted on “waivers.” The *America 2000* plan states:

We expect that the Design Teams will begin by erasing all conventional assumptions and constraints about schooling: the schedule (and calendar), curriculum, class size, the pace of learning, teacher/student ratios, adult roles, teacher recruitment, health and nutrition, discipline, staff development, organizational and management structures, resource allocation, students-as-tutors, the nature of instructional materials and much more (p. 30)

Waivers exclude charter schools from a significant chunk of state and local regulations, including many of those guaranteeing the safety of students. For example: waivers can

grant charter operators the right to retain control over their own operations; eliminate enrollment caps, ease restrictions on employee qualifications; and exempt charters from state collective bargaining laws. The theory behind waivers for charters holds that “free market” competition would drive charters to the straight and narrow course and keep operators above board. This, of course, ignores that fact that education reform-style “choice” is not based on true “free market” economics.

Waivers mean that charter schools do not have to jump through as many bureaucratic hurdles. But waivers also mean that there are few safety nets in place when things go wrong. When charters are mismanaged, parents have discovered that they haven’t many options for complaint, and little power to rectify the situation. Should troubles develop, there are few, if any, avenues for parental appeal. Charter school operators, even though they are on the government dole, have been granted the unbridled authority to make decisions directly impacting students -- what grades to offer, the number of children to enroll, what textbooks to purchase, whom to hire, where to locate, the condition of the facilities, etc. All they have to guarantee is acceptable performance on the designated assessment test.

Charter schools often experience growing pains that create dangers for children. According to an article in the *Akron Beacon-Journal* a Columbus, Ohio, bootcamp style charter opened without a working telephone in the facility and with portapotties in the parking lot. The police were called 12 times in several months for disruptions, including one charge of sexual assault. In mid-October 2002, “350 employees of charter schools did not have criminal background checks completed, and 36 had not even applied to the Ohio Bureau of Criminal Identification & Investigation. A month later, only two schools were in full compliance.” (“Parents have freedom of choice, but not freedom of information” by Doug Oplinger and Dennis J. Willard, *Akron Beacon-Journal*, 12/12/99.)

In another issue examined by the *Akron Beacon-Journal*, a chain of Ohio charter schools targeting children with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) for enrollment was audited by the state for re-labeling students who enrolled with designations which included “severely emotionally disturbed.” According to a former teacher, the re-labeling was performed by school staff members who “were untrained to evaluate mental capabilities... [with] no parents present.”

The school gets about \$13,000 in state and local funds for each student classified with a special education problem – nearly double the money it would get for educating a regular student or one with ADD.

And nearly every student at Summit Academy Akron is reported to have a special education problem, even though most of them didn’t carry that designation when they were enrolled in public schools.

Now, allegations that Summit Academy has intentionally misidentified students with special education disabilities have drawn unscheduled audits from the Ohio Department of Education at two schools. And Akron Public Schools officials have

asked state Auditor Jim Petro to review Summit Academy's special education records.

In question is whether millions in tax dollars that flow into the eight Summit Academy charter schools in Ohio owned by Peter DiMezza of Akron have been properly obtained and used. ("School fund sham?" by Reginald Fields, *Akron Beacon-Journal*, 5/12/02)

Bruno Manno, a well-known "choice" proponent, admits to one charter's "accounting irregularities, governance tiffs, and overreporting of enrollments":

The new D.C. school board moved during the 2001-'02 school year to close three other schools chartered by the previous board. They had an array of problems: overcrowded classrooms with little ventilation, high absentee rates, few textbooks and other instructional materials, abysmal academic results, and failure to file financial reports and to offer the advertised courses. ("Yellow Flag," *Education Next*, Winter 2003)

Bruno Manno's solution to the crisis cited above? The National Association of Charter School Authorizers, who will press for "results" and "accountability" in "choice." "Results" and "accountability" are sacred to education reform ideology. It doesn't matter *how* the results are obtained. It just matters that they *are* obtained.

Waivers are a crisis waiting to happen. This is by design. Troubles will erupt as a natural result of this intentional design flaw. It only takes one big headline disaster for a national push to institutionalize education reform mandates on *all* "choice" options, including the last bastions of truly free choice: homeschools and private schools. This is why it is so imperative for "choice" reformers to broaden the definition of homeschooling. Once there is a well-publicized calamity -- say, for example, with a cybercharter that superficially resembles homeschooling -- the reformers fully intend to start the drumbeat for more onerous governmental regulations, oversight, and intrusions on *all* choice, not just public "choice." No child shall be left behind.

Waivers for Favors

There is another convenient loophole in charter waiver design. Disasters, such as the ones cited above, surprisingly do not result in bad charter operators put out of business or their schools shut down. This is because waivers for "choice" always come with *favors* for "choice." Politics is the name of the game. In return for being granted certain "waivers" which benefit business interests, the innovators turn their profits into political action -- especially highly financed, well-oiled political action committees. This political action translates directly into advocacy for education reform measures including, of course, more "choice."

Stories have appeared in the press about enormous campaign contributions, political pay-offs, potential conflicts of interest and other sleazy political maneuvers. Private

foundations, public policy groups, “choice” advocacy organizations, education officials and “choice” operators move back and forth across the “choice spectrum, serving in various roles and capacities which promote an agenda that profits them directly. (See http://www.susanohanian.org/atrocities_fetch.php?id+323 for one pertinent story.) In exchange for political favors (\$\$\$) charter operators have been granted business waivers (\$\$\$).

The most notorious “choice” tycoon is David Brennan of White Hat Management. His saga, which traverses the “choice” spectrum from the Cleveland vouchers to charters, was recorded in a 1999 *Akron Beacon-Journal* article series by reporters Dennis J. Willard and Doug Oplinger (“In education, money talks,” 12/13/99). An examination of the campaign finance database at the Ohio Secretary of State’s website reveals that since the initial gubernatorial campaign of former-governor George Voinovich, an active “choice” proponent, the Brennan family has contributed over \$1.8 million dollars to “conservative” Republican candidates, who in turn greased the political, legislative, legal, judicial and bureaucratic machinery that furthered a “choice” empire. Certain “irregularities” were winked at or ignored, which allowed Brennan to move with ease from a troubled voucher initiative directly into charters. In a PBS interview, Brennan reveals how the squeaky wheel got greased:

Combining all those reasons together we decided to close our voucher schools as of June [1999], and coincidentally, charter legislation permitted us to open schools in those same locations and that’s what we did. But I probably feel more forcefully than I ever have that vouchers are the answer for the problem. **Charters are a way station on the way to getting full choice through vouchers.** [emphasis added] (“The Battle Over School Choice, Frontline, 2000, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/vouchers/interviews>)

It is not a coincidence that Brennan’s White Hat Management has now created its own version of a cybercharter, the Alternative Education Academy (also known as OHDELA). OHDELA chose a target marketing strategy identical to William Bennett’s, i.e., capitalizing on the reputation of homeschoolers.

The “waivers for favors” system creates financial windfalls for charter operators, and there are immediate political repercussions. Mom and pop homeschoolers who live on one income can’t begin to compete with this Goliath. Perhaps this situation wouldn’t be very serious if, indeed, the cyberschool merchants were truly “friends” of homeschoolers. But, as the record will show (see Part 3), the very men who are proponents of “choice” are also sounding the loudest drumbeats for “results,” “standards,” “accountability,” and “assessments.” Their “choice” is not true choice – the choice that homeschoolers currently enjoy now. Their “choice” is government “choice,” which is no choice at all. And cybercharters are the perfect look-alike instrument with which to foist this reform agenda upon an unsuspecting and naïve homeschooling community.

The real threat to public education does not come from the tiny remnant of mom and pop homeschool families. The real threat to traditional public education comes from the new

“choice” of the education reformers. Canned “choice” is activating key elements of education reform that will change local community-based public schools forever. It is the best tool ever devised for such a purpose because 1) it perfectly deceives the public, 2) it creates crises (through the use of waivers), and 3) pre-determined solutions are waiting in the wings.

“Choice” proponents knew all along that there would be fiscal and educational disaster with experimental schooling options. They even knew about personal safety and sanitation dangers to children. Nevertheless for over a decade now, “choice” proponents have been continuing their push for waivers, for innovations and “break the mold” schooling. To the public, the “choice” proponents cite guarantees of excellence in education, point to high “standards,” parental freedom to choose what is best for their children, and “free market” checks and balances. But, when they write amongst themselves in the higher echelons of public policy institutes, think tanks and education periodicals, they speak a different language – that of education reform. In the rarified air of education bureaucratic lingo, another agenda is at work

Tests Drive the Reform Engine

“Choice” is an acceptable form of education reform because it is part of the “system.” The reason it is part of the system is simple: the test. Before proceeding, it is necessary to review the basics about education reform. In a nutshell, education reform is a SYSTEM (womb to tomb) founded upon a METHOD (operant conditioning). The system runs via a FEEDBACK MECHANISM (assessment test) that is DATABANKED (computer-stored). STANDARDS set the criteria for measuring the degree to which rewards and penalties are bestowed to the child, teacher, school, district and state. The most essential component of a smooth-running education reform system is a well-devised assessment test. The test drives the entire reform engine. Little Johnny or Susie sit at their desk and answer questions on this assessment. These answers are then fed into a databank, processed, and regurgitated in the form of rewards or penalties to student, teacher, school officials, school building, and school district.

Since the 1980s, when the national testing agenda rose to prominence, testing has been one of the least understood aspects of the education reform plan. The public thinks they are getting old-fashioned achievement tests that measure academic progress. But the education reform tests “assess” a child’s progress not only on academics, but also their political correctness, worldview, beliefs, opinions, values and attitudes. These tests have state-prescribed “correct” answers to questions that formerly were considered private and personal matters. And these tests are now “high stakes,” which means that rewards and penalties are attached to them.

For perhaps thousands of years teachers and tutors have employed tests as a way to measure what a child has actually learned. Does Joey know that $2+2=4$? A simple mathematical quiz will quickly reveal Joey’s strengths and deficiencies in knowledge of subject matter. A competent teacher will then review the material with Joey and make sure he learns the answers that he has missed. This type of academic test is non-

standardized and purely academic. Curriculum-based tests used to operate the same way, simply identifying the degree to which the student had learned the subject matter covered in the book. The advent of standardized tests began to change all of this. Standardized academic achievement tests were an instrument that told parents and teachers how well their children were performing on certain subjects *as compared to their peers*.

Since the days of John Dewey, a certain segment in the upper echelons of education have sought to reform education so that it would become a vehicle to transform society, particularly towards a form of socialism. Today, the reformers will argue that education must socialize children, prepare them for the global workforce, teach them interpersonal skills and equip them for lifelong learning. All of these goals have attitudinal, values-laden components which are then embedded into the standards and assessments. Embedding these worldviews in psycho-social assessments ensures that they will become integrated into American life and culture within a decade or two. The obvious trouble with such a grand scheme is obvious – not all Americans share the same values, attitudes, opinions, beliefs and feelings. The assessment testing mandate ensures that the next generation of children will conform to this government-prescribed mindset like clones.

If little Johnny or Susie answers too many questions incorrectly, including the value-laden questions, he/she won't pass the test. The repercussions for this will be felt all the way up the line. Make no mistake about it: the onus rests on the child. And children know it. Stories of children being frightened to the point of physical illness have been repeated around the country. News accounts have reported on teaching to the test, excessive preoccupation with test preparation, and even cheating on tests. Everything hinges on "the test." This is what "accountability" is all about.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, or "The Nation's Report Card") is the gold standard for all U.S. assessments. Under the *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) federal education reform act, state standards and assessments must become aligned with federal requirements. To make sure that this will be accomplished properly, the feds now carry a big stick. All states must have submitted accountability plans to the U.S. Department of Education by the end of January 2003. The law forces states to show improvement or face tough consequences, including loss of federal dollars. Everybody from Johnny and Susie on up will receive "report cards." These report cards are peddled to an unsuspecting public as a reliable method of ascertaining a school's *academic* progress. The report cards are used by everyone from mayors promoting communities to corporations, to real estate salespersons selling neighborhoods. In reality, however, the report cards are all based on the *psycho-social* assessment scores of little Johnny and little Susie.

High stakes testing is currently designed to hold a child's school accountable for meeting state and federal standards. Under the NCLB Act, in the first year of poor performance, the school will have to improve itself. In the second year, children will be given the option to transfer to another school. Third and fourth year penalties become increasingly excessive and coercive. The second year of the penalties phase could be a windfall for charter operators. This is when parents, who are deceived by the "report card" scores

(thinking them to be indicative of academic failure), or dismayed by the reduction in school funding, may throw up their hands in exasperation and decide to try charters or other vehicles of “choice.”

The “choice” promoters are waiting in the wings to receive little Johnny and Susie into their cybercoffers. These “choice” options, however, are not true “choice.” Charter schools give assessment tests because that has now become an essential part of the definition of “public” school. Therefore, children will not escape assessments, or the curriculum that produces “success,” simply by transferring over to a new school. But they might escape the penalties – for now. Children cannot escape the test. No matter where they go, the test will be there.

Databanking Devices

The scores from little Johnny and Susie’s NAEP tests travel to a databank – and beyond.³ How far beyond has never been divulged to the public. The key point is that the government, along with various contractors and subcontractors, all have access to the test question data of its citizenry from tests that are not simply academic, but also psycho-social in nature. Big Brother knows what your children are thinking, feeling, believing, and valuing.

Databanking the assessment results is the key to education reform. Everything hinges on the databank. Each year, or series of years, the databank is updated to reflect a child’s new scores. These scores are compared to prior scores, rewards and penalties are meted out, and the “progress” of children toward a national standard is recorded. Curriculum and educational processes that produce “success” are given the government’s stamp of approval as “programs that work” and federal dollars follow.

Groups of citizens have valiantly tried for several decades, legislatively and through the courts, without much success, to stop this flow of intimate information. Significantly, national “conservative” leaders and organizations have by and large not only failed to support these citizens, but have actually stood in their way or sabotaged their efforts. National “liberal” organizations have proven to be equally untrustworthy. While “left” and “right” mucky -mucks were locked in spurious battles over turf, semantics and outcomes, the real issue is the significant loss individual freedom and privacy, and the encroaching power of the state.

One might have assumed that the supposedly politically conservative “choice” proponents would oppose such a gargantuan governmental intrusion into the deepest recesses of the human mind, especially when it involves mass coercion on a scale not seen since Stalin. Such is not the case. In fact, it is quite the opposite. Chester Finn, a close colleague of William Bennett’s, and staunch “choice” advocate, has written:

For too long, U.S. education has lacked meaningful standards and avoided real accountability. Thankfully, this is starting to change.

The quest for educational accountability relies on a three-legged stool: standards, assessments, and consequences.

...How do we know if a student, teacher, or school is meeting the standards? Tests, directly linked to the standards, are critical.

...Finally, standards and tests must be coupled with consequences. ("Standards, Testing & Accountability," www.edexcellence.net/topics/standards.html)

Dr. Chester E. Finn, Jr., is president of the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation which is an education reform group specializing in "choice," "accountability," and "standards." Finn was Assistant Secretary for Research and Improvement (OERI) at the U.S. Department of Education from 1985-88, during Bennett's tenure as Secretary of Education. Finn has written exhaustively over the past decade about the use of assessment tests in education reform, focusing a great deal of attention on "accountability." It was Chester Finn who is largely credited with authoring the original education reform plan, *America 2000*. Ironically, even though he has ironclad credentials as one of the chief architects and promoters of education reform, Finn is cast as a political conservative by the education establishment and the media. This is in part due to the fact that he is pro- "choice." But he is also a master at writing "you have to do it *this way*" pieces that tweak liberal democrat positions.

In 1992 Finn wrote in the *Wall Street Journal*, "Clear standards can be the centerpiece of radical change." (3/23/92). A few years later Finn joined the chorus for "local control" and downsizing the U.S. Department of Education, a politically conservative rallying cry. He explains how this could work:

It's time- past time -- to "send education home," in Mr. [Lamar] Alexander's phrase. The schools cannot be fixed in Washington. They are the proper work of states, localities, teachers and parents.... What should remain in Washington? Not a lot: **statistics; perhaps a bit of research; the assessment of student performance at the international, national and state levels....** [Emphasis added] ("A Primer for Education Reform," *Wall Street Journal*, 1/13/95)

Colleagues William Bennett and Lamar Alexander, both former U.S. Secretaries of Education from Republican administrations, agreed on the same agenda in a speech before Congress:

The gathering, analysis and reporting of education statistics would be placed under the jurisdiction of the National Education Goals Panel, consisting of governors, legislators, members of Congress and senior officials of the executive branch. Assessment of student achievement at the international, national and state levels would become the unambiguous responsibility of a rehabilitated National Assessment Governing Board, overseen in turn by the Goals Panel. (Empower America, "Abolishing the Department of Education in Order to Liberate Parents and Schools,"

A joint statement by former Secretaries of Education Lamar Alexander and William J. Bennett, delivered to a House committee, Jan. 26, 1995.

In short, everything would fall under a federal entity overseeing assessment testing. Three of the country's foremost "choice" proponents – Alexander, Bennett and Finn -- were lauded across the country by Republican conservatives for their call to dismantle the U.S. Department of Education. In response, vitriolic pieces were written by education journals and public policy institutes from the Left, decrying this agenda. This artificial debate in the media masked the real plan that these men were advocating – the databank. This is what Finn, Bennett and Alexander wanted leftover after disbanding the U.S. Department of Education in Washington: the centralization of statistics, research and assessment performance results.

The federal databank is a hungry creature. There are children "left behind" whose assessment scores are not yet recorded. Bennett, Alexander and Finn promote "choice" because they know that charter schools function perfectly to fill in the gaps, catching more children in the web. When parents are enticed away from private schools and homeschools to place their children into charters, their children are then tested and entered into the government databank. Charter schools, because they are public schools, administer assessments to children. Charter schools promise to deliver better test scores, which means that they must teach in a way that meets or exceeds the new standards. Many, including Bennett, brag that their curriculum is aligned to state (meaning federal) standards.

Assessment test results feed the databank. As long as children become effectively indoctrinated with the proper academic and psycho-social attitudes, values, beliefs, opinions and ideas, the reform engine chugs along merrily, eagerly gobbling up new scores. Part 3 of this report will reveal the staggering extent to which these three men and their cohorts have engineered and advanced this facet of the education reform agenda.

The conclusion is inescapable. The purpose is control of an entire population of children, including their teachers, through the use of coercive and punitive government-sanctioned methods – based on the databanking of test scores. Leading education reformers have never hidden this agenda. But neither have they trumpeted it openly. One has to dig through the massive reams of reform documents, public policy papers, think tank reports and government papers to see the full picture. Excerpts from these key documents can be found in *the deliberate dumbing down of America: A Chronological Paper Trail* by Charlotte Iserbyt (www.deliberatedumbingdown.com).

The *No Child Left Behind* Act has openly instituted the utopian (but totalitarian) systemic changes envisioned by the leading reformers of the past several decades. Fully implemented "choice" has the capability to change traditional public schools beyond recognition. Educators might agree now with the politically and ideologically "correct" assumptions underlying the psycho-social testing instruments. But will they agree with these ideas as they evolve in the future? What if they dislike the government-prescribed

psycho-social-political curriculum of cookie-cutter schools in the future? Where will they be able to send their children when there are no more true choices?

Full “choice” intends to wipe out the remaining bastions of true choice. If homeschool and private school parents lose the right to truly choose an education for their children, then this right has been lost forever in America.

Part 3: William Bennett and the De-Valuing of America: Cronyism, Communitarianism, and Crisis

*See “The Pizza Choice Game.”

1. <http://www.deliberatedumbingdown.com>
2. See chapter 9, “Cognitive’ versus ‘Academic’: A Critical Distinction,” Eakman, B.K. *Educating for the New World Order* (Portland, OR: Halcyon House, 1991), p. 65-69.
3. “When Johnny Takes the Test,” by Melanie K. Fields, Sarah H. Leslie, and Anita B. Hoge. See <http://www.deliberatedumbingdown.com>.
4. Ibid.

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