

LOOKING AHEAD

The Cornell Roosevelt Institute Policy Journal

Center for Education Policy and Development

Issue No. 3, Fall 2012



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About the Roosevelt Institute

The Roosevelt Institute at Cornell University is a student-run think tank that generates, advocates, and lobbies for progressive policy ideas and initiatives in local, university, state, and national government. Members write for our campus policy journals, complete advocacy and education projects in the local community, host research discussions with professors, write policy and political blogs, and organize campus political debates and policy seminars.

The Roosevelt Institute is organized in 7 policy centers:

Center for Economic Policy and Development
Center for Foreign Policy and International Studies
Center for Energy and Environmental Policy
Center for Education Policy and Development
Center for Healthcare Policy
Center for Domestic Policy
Center for Local Government and University Affairs

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Letter from the Policy Director

Dear Readers,

I am pleased to present the third issue of *Looking Ahead: The Cornell Roosevelt Institute Policy Journal* by the Center for Education Policy and Development. This publication comprises the work of five Roosevelt Institute Center for Education Policy and Development analysts covering topics related to nontraditional students, the prominence of athletics, after-school programs, modernization, and for-profit colleges. Each writer chose a topic of interest, carefully researched the relevant issues, and developed an innovative policy proposal. I am excited to share our work with you and hope you find it to be enjoyable and thought-provoking!

The Center, and the Institute as a whole, is composed of intelligent, passionate, dedicated student volunteers who share a communal faith in scholarship and knowledge as the engines for reform. These progressive disciples provide their outlines for improving public policy and ultimately augmenting our governmental system for the betterment of the common good. This publication is our effort to democracy by educating the public about issues affecting them and nurturing an active citizenry to implement change.

Sincerely,

Matthew S. Lynch

History and Near Eastern Studies (A&S '14)

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Regulatory Changes Stop Predation by For-Profit Colleges

By Reed DesRosiers '14, Major: Policy Analysis and Management (HumEc), Email: rpd59@cornell.edu

For-profit colleges provide convenient educational opportunities for many atypical American students, however, these academies are harmful to their constituents. They place profit before people by directing more funds towards advertising than their curricula, yielding a sub-par education for their paying students.

Background:

For-profit colleges provide nontraditional educational opportunities for many of the 13 million unemployed, and 90 million underemployed Americans by providing a skills-based education that serves advance employment opportunities.¹ Due to scheduling, location, and an abundance of online classes, these for-profit colleges offer a flexible and feasible education opportunities for many minorities, parents, and both working and non-working families.² In fact, they specifically expend more recruitment efforts on students from disadvantaged populations.³

Key Facts:

- For-profit colleges grew by 225% between 1998 and 2008.
- 54% of students who enrolled in 2008-2009 left without a degree or certificate by mid-2010.
- Most for-profit colleges devote more resources to attracting students than they do to instructing them.

However, because of the corporate nature of many of the largest private sector providers, for-profit colleges are primarily focused on revenues and profits rather than student success. Whether or not for-profit colleges provide a cost-effective outcome is up for debate, but the latest Senate HELP Committee report insists that they do not.⁴ While the retention rates between for-profit colleges and their community college counterparts are similar, the costs are not. For-profits, who charge more, are a riskier investment for students and taxpayers.⁴ For-profit colleges play an important role in providing educational options for nontraditional students, but the colleges often operate as aggressive marketing machines focused on promoting success for shareholders, not students.

History:

For-profit postsecondary schools are not new to the educational landscape. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a multitude of proprietary institutions

emerged to meet the growing demand for business, managerial, and secretarial skills in the workforce. However, as public high schools expanded and increased their vocational and business opportunities, enrollment at these institutions began to drop. Many—Bryant and Stratton College (1854), Globe University (1885), Strayer University (1892), Blair College (1897, now Everest College), and Rasmussen College—were able to survive the period of declining enrollment, and still exist today.⁵

Enrollment is exploding again. The for-profit college population grew by 225% between 1998 and 2008. During that same period, enrollment in all degree-granting higher-education institutions grew by 31%.⁴ Students who are eligible for federal financial aid can use their grant money at for-profit institutions, as long as student-aid does not account for more than 90% of that institution’s revenues. In other words, for-profit colleges can receive 90% of their revenues from the government, indirectly.⁵

Analysis:

Although acknowledging the necessity of for-profit institutions in meeting the growing demand for higher-education, the Senate HELP Committee’s analysis from 2010 to 2012 emphasizes several serious flaws. Many students are leaving the for-profit institutions without degrees or job prospects.

Talking Points:

- Due to regulatory loopholes, for-profit college can obtain 100% of their revenues from government sources.
- Many of these companies employ ten recruitment employees for each career services staff member. This can be fixed using simple proportion requirements.

Those who are receiving degrees are paying astronomically higher prices—20% higher for Bachelor’s degrees and 400% higher for Associate degrees on average. Certificate programs average 450% of the cost of similar programs at comparable community colleges.⁴ To afford this education, 96% of students at for-profit institutions take out student loans, compared to only 13% for students attending community college.⁴

For these higher costs, students may expect to achieve better results, but this is not the case. 54% of students who enrolled in 2008-2009 left without a degree or certificate by mid-2010.⁴ Another study published in the Journal of Economic Perspectives in 2012 found that six years after beginning their program, graduates of for-profit institutions are more likely to be unemployed, and can expect to earn around \$2000 less than had they received another type of education.³

The reason for this price and outcome gap is that most for-profit companies devote more resources to attracting students than they do to instructing them. In 2009, the companies investigated by the Senate spent 23% of their revenue on “marketing,

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advertising, recruiting, and admissions staffing” while spending only 17% on instruction. Additionally, these companies employ ten recruitment employees for each career services staff member. Two of the largest businesses employ no career services employees whatsoever.³

Although the “90-10” rule stipulates that for-profit colleges may not receive more than 90% of their funding from government sources, they have found a loophole to avoid this regulation. Because GI Bill education grants for veterans do not technically fall under the “government sources” category, the colleges can use GI Bill grants to fill the 10% category of the 90-10 rule.⁶ This makes it possible for for-profits to gain 100% of their funding from the federal government.

Next Steps:

To solve the problems currently facing students of for-profit education, it is necessary for the government to take action. The first step that the government must take is to redefine the parameters for the 90-10 rule. They must make GI Bill funding fall into the 90% portion to ensure that for-profit colleges are receiving some money from non-government sources. Secondly, they should mandate certain proportion limits on the number of employees tasked to student career-services versus recruitment, advertising, and admissions employees. A final solution would be to set proportion limits on the percent of revenue expended on instruction versus the percent of revenue expended on advertising, marketing and recruiting expenses. If these simple regulations were adopted, it would serve to provide students with valuable protections against predatory marketing techniques, and improve the education and career outlooks provided by for-profit colleges.

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Breaking the Barriers: Nontraditional Students and Higher Education

By Susan Porter '14, Major: Industrial Labor Relations (ILR), Email: smp328@cornell.edu

Without a college degree or technical/trade school certification, the disenfranchised will be sentenced to low-wage employment and earn below a living wage. Streamlined admission procedures for postsecondary education will help remove barriers for non-traditional students.

Background:

Jobs that once afforded high-school educated workers a middle-class life-style have disappeared; the situation offers a bleak outlook for this portion of the work force. Without financial means, college is oftentimes an unattainable goal. It is not just the tuition that creates a barrier for admission; four-year

universities often require current SAT scores from all applicants – even from those who have just successfully finished their Associates Degree from a two-year community college. The additional costs of preparing and sitting for the SAT tests create an even higher barrier for the unemployed or for the working poor. Streamlining admissions procedures at public universities for students who have successfully completed two years at a community college will help to offer a path to higher education for the disenfranchised.

By creating partnerships between public four-year and two-year institutions, it is possible to provide guaranteed acceptance to a four-year institution to students who have successfully completed the two-year Associate Degree program at a local community college. This process would eliminate many of the costs associated with the application process.

History:

In today's world, the programs aimed at helping non-traditional students are obsolete because the very definition of 'non-traditional' student has changed. Due to outsourcing and the evolving economy, the careers that once provided wages to support a middle-class lifestyle to individuals without a higher education no longer exist – they have vanished. In today's environment, the jobs offering wages that will support a middle-

Key Facts:

- Base cost of SAT Reasoning Test - \$50¹
- Each additional SAT Subject Test - \$23²
- SAT prep courses range from \$169 per course - \$2,990 for the "Ultimate Edition."³
- Costs of community colleges are approximately 1/3 the cost of a traditional four-year institution (per credit hour cost).⁴

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class lifestyle require more advanced training and higher education. This trend eliminates opportunities for many highly-qualified adults who fail to meet the new criteria: this is the new 'atypical' student. They are caught in a vicious cycle of not meeting the criteria, and because of unemployment, they often lack the financial means to attain the necessary education and training to gain sustainable employment.

Analysis:

Olivera Perkins of Cleveland's Plain Dealer examined the vanishing middle-class and found, "Six of the 10 occupations losing the most jobs were moderate or higher-paying. They included executive secretaries and administrative assistants; business operation specialists, including brokers; and most secondary-school teaching positions. The two fastest-growing occupations were lower-paying: food preparation and serving workers, with a median hourly pay of \$8.71, and home health aides, at \$9.18 an hour."⁵ Many of these vanishing professions did not require a college education and they paid a living wage.

Talking Points:

- Encourage four-year colleges to wave SAT scores for nontraditional students who can provide current transcripts from a community college.
- Urge two-and-four-year colleges to work together to evaluate current coursework to see how they can better coordinate their efforts.
- Create a public service campaign to encourage older adults to further their education.

Without a college education, low-wage jobs will be the only option for someone looking for employment. These low-wage employment opportunities impose a financial burden on the government as well. Gene Carroll, of Cornell's School of Industrial and Labor Relations explained the troubling situation of low-paying jobs; the wages and hours offered to employees are not enough on which to survive. The low-wage earner ends up being subsidized by the American Taxpayers in the form of Food and Health Care subsidies.⁶ It would be wise to investigate the costs of educating vs. subsidies to see which cost is more beneficial to society as a whole.

The initial stage of the policy would call on "Public Universities" to partner with local "Community Colleges" and develop and/or expand partnership programs. These programs would:

- Provide seamless transfer from community college to a neighboring four-year college.
- Allow students to take credited courses at the community college that will transfer to the four year degree providing an affordable way for the student to obtain as many credits as possible prior to transferring to the four-year school.
- Identify educational needs currently unmet by today's curriculum.

Next Steps:

Completed research will define the most efficient way to bridge the gap between the non-traditional student and a higher education. The goal is to start with the relationship between public universities and local community colleges. The international honor society recognizing and encouraging academic achievement of two- year college students, Phi Theta Kappa, is the conduit for this strategy; they have a great standing relationship with both two and four year colleges.

Continued research with Columbia University's Community College Research Center and with Phi Theta Kappa will consist of:

- Traditional ties between Public Colleges and Community Colleges
- Phi Theta Kappa and its role in retaining students.

As the government is looking at ways to cut spending in higher education, it is prudent to take a hard look at how our public institutions can work together to educate those in need of higher learning and reduce associated costs to the public. An educated population is the key to a prosperous nation.

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An Apple a Day Keeps the Teacher Away

By Anika Alam '15, Major: Policy Analysis and Management (HumEc), Email: aza8@cornell.edu

The government should not subsidize the use of iPads and encourage their use as a primary learning tool. There are both consequences and externalities associated with the use of iPads on a daily basis, which will ultimately hinder the student's education.

Background/History:

Technology has rapidly become a popular avenue in schools for building student-centered learning environments. In 2006, iPods were subsidized and used as teaching gadgets to many schools in North Carolina. Similar approaches such the use of laptops, tablets, and other gadgets have been widespread in schools. In 2011, when the prices of iPads became slightly more affordable, many teachers began using them. Since then, many professional development programs such as Teaching for 21st Century, or "T21", have been implemented to focus on iPad integration in schools¹. This model of professional learning is promoted through boot camps and training programs for teachers to encourage modernization in the classroom.

Key Facts:

- The iPads generally cost districts, depending on accessories or service plans, between \$500 and \$600. (USA Today)
- The nation's textbook publishing industry earns \$5.5 billion annually in sales to secondary schools. (USA Today)
- A school buying 300 textbooks for its freshman class could save \$4,000 from using iPads and buying those textbooks online.

Schools in more than 24 states have already adopted the use of iPads in schools.² Although no state legislation to provide iPads has been enacted, many state boards and counties have passed acts which promote student use of this technology. The cost of providing iPads has great variation among each school, depending on its prevalence in the classroom and the target group of students.

Proponents of iPad use argue that it is revolutionary in incentivizing and generating interest among students. Students can break away from one-dimensional textbook learning and engage in interactive learning at a higher level of engagement. Schools also argue that it is more cost effective than purchasing textbooks and other school supplies.

Analysis:

The integration of iPads in schools is a difficult policy to implement in several aspects. Gadgets are multifaceted, and teachers cannot prevent abuses to the technology. In

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class, students can use the iPad to play games, socialize, and search for answers to in-class questions, or even send test answers to other students during an exam. Many parents and teachers would be uncomfortable knowing that students have such freedom on, and of, the internet.

Talking points:

- Students will become so dependent on technology that they will forget how to think critically for themselves.
- “If I can’t afford to buy my child an iPad on my own, I certainly can’t afford to pay for it if it gets damaged or lost.”
- “Children will destroy iPads in no time. Who will pay to replace them?”

Student dependence on technology is a major concern. Rather than looking through books for the correct answer, it has become second nature for many to rely on Google. The goal of technology is to use it as a teaching tool, but it is risk-adverse; some teachers will replace all classroom interaction and use iPads to teach their students, hurting the students’ abilities to critically think for themselves. Technology will be misused as something that will keep students occupied.

The critical point of this policy is that there are no clear or defined boundaries. Providing iPads may be cost effective and environment-friendly, but there is no way to monitor the conditions of iPads during the school year. Many students, especially those in elementary school, may not be familiarized on how to take care and maintain gadgets, and there are extremely high chances that students are likely to vandalize, damage, lose, or steal iPads. There are no clearly defined conditions on how much students will have to pay if this situation arises. And if students are given iPads, students cannot be expected to pay for any of the costs. Although some schools do provide insurance covering partial costs, many families cannot afford to pay for something that was provided by the school. By preventing schools from using iPads on a daily basis, the families will not be risk-prone and will not have to suffer future consequences.

One alternative is to increase subsidized *partial* use of technology in schools, such as increasing the number of library lending/loaning programs in public schools. With this program, students will have the opportunity to learn the professional skills needed to handle a gadget, but will not rely on it for all academic purposes.

Rather than having T21 programs which promote iPad integration into the classroom environment, there should be more professional development programs on how to help failing students raise their test scores to state standards. Teach for America and many other programs do bring teachers to failing schools, but there are not enough training programs to help current teachers devise new strategies of increasing where interaction among students in groups would be encouraged. There are limitless methods of teaching, which have educated humans for centuries now; using technology as a sole teaching tool will only hurt the future.

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Next Steps:

The Department of Education, state boards, and local counties should not support the allocation of iPads to public school students. There are many alternatives to simply handing out expensive gadgets to students which will also achieve the goal of reducing technology dependence.

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A Second Wave: Afterschool Programs for Low Income Schools

By Cayley Heller '14, Major: Policy Analysis and Management (HumEc), Email: cdh88@cornell.edu

With an ever-increasing income achievement gap, action needs to be taken to address the education of disadvantaged students. The New York City Department of Education should fund built in afterschool programming.

Background:

A recent study by Stanford University sociologist Sean F. Reardon found that the gap in standardized test scores between high and low-income students has grown by about 40% since the 1960s.

Key Facts:

- The gap in standardized test scores between high and low-income students has grown by about 40% since the 1960s.
- Of students surveyed from New York City Beacon Centers, 75% feel they get better grades in school.

Increased homework has been cited as one reason for the increased achievement gap. Homework for elementary school students increased 50% between 1980 and 2000. In lower-income households, parents often have less education available to meet their children's growing need for homework support than a more affluent parent might be able to offer. The income achievement gap may also be attributed to different levels of investment in dance classes, afterschool sports, music lessons or tutoring sessions between the wealthiest and poorest of the nation.

The widening of this gap is a threat to American values of opportunity for mobility and equality, as education is often considered a 'great equalizer' in our society, meant to close - not further - the gap between the rich and poor.

History:

Much legislation and programming has attempted to slow and reverse the growing income achievement gap. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, one of the largest of these attempts aimed to address education for disadvantaged students on a national scale, largely in the creation of accountability mandates. Students would be required to take standardized exams and schools would be held accountable for the results, facing the threat of reduced funding or the loss of students to other districts.

One response to tighter demands for greater student performance has been an uptick in the number of schools eliminating recess. Syracuse Chief Academic Officer Laura

Kelley argued that more instruction time was more important to increasing student achievement than a recess period. Meanwhile, experts such as University of Georgia professor Dr. Tony Pellegrini assert that recess ultimately helps students concentrated during class and is an avenue for the development of students' social skills. Schools of lower-income families are more likely to see recess periods disappear.

The Twenty-First Century Community Learning Center Initiative laid out another approach to addressing the education of disadvantaged children. The federal program provides formula grants to promote the creation of community learning centers to provide extra help and enrichment activities to children, particularly in low-performing schools. NYC's Beacon program provides 80 school-based community centers for all ages with activities such as math clubs, sports, chess, tutoring and photography.

Analysis:

Of students surveyed for their participation in Beacon Community Centers, 80% felt they finished their homework more often and 75% felt they got better grades in school. Research from the Harvard Family Research Project has found that participation in after school programs leads to better attitudes toward school, higher educational aspirations, better attendance rates, less disciplinary action, lower dropout rates and greater engagement in learning activities.

Talking Points:

- The income achievement gap has been increasing over the last 30 years.
- Afterschool program participants report better performance in school, develop better social skills and attitude and benefit from the "safe haven effect" through reduced crime and lower levels of drug use.
- The NYC Department of Education should fund afterschool programming to address the income achievement gap.

After-school programming also provides opportunities to develop social skills. Participation in these activities has been linked to greater problem solving skills, higher self esteem, better communication skills, greater leadership skills and better relationships between peers.

The benefits of after-school programming extend beyond the direct academic sphere: 3-6pm is the peak time for juvenile delinquency, and by keeping children supervised for a longer period of time, they have less time to engage in criminal behavior.

The supervised time has been credited for keeping children off the streets and reducing their potential for drug use. These benefits stand alone, but also resonate again through school achievement. Educational outcomes are not solely based on schools, but on a child's home and neighborhood environment as well.

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Next Steps:

According to the Afterschool Alliance, 46% of children not enrolled in afterschool programs in NYC would be likely to participate if there were programs in their community. The NYC Department of Education should fund afterschool_type programming built in to the school day for districts serving low-income families. The State Department of Education should subsidize these programs, as they could provide a model for the future.

The proposed programming should be in line with the goals of the Twenty-First Century Community Learning Initiative and provide the activities as outlined by the Beacon programs. To reduce costs, the city should encourage partnerships between schools and local universities in order to promote the involvement of graduate and undergraduate students through student teaching, internship and mentorship opportunities. Schools should establish mentorship programs between older and younger students, and establish relationships with programs like Big Brother, Big Sister to create a friendly, well-supervised environment.

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Modifying Athletics within High School Curricula

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The government should seek ways to reduce the influence of athletics on high school curricula. This diversion will allow a better allocation of school resources and improve the academic integrity of American schools.

Background:

Student participation in sports provides opportunities for adolescents to enhance their education outside of the classroom. It allows them to foster necessary skills for the workplace such as leadership, accountability and teamwork, while simultaneously developing lasting friendships, a sense of community, and life lessons.⁴

Unfortunately, the increasing influence of athletics in learning institutions is creating negative externalities that harm American—especially high school—education. Public spending on high school athletics has grown extreme, exemplified by a public school in Allen, Texas, as it built a \$60 million football stadium in 2011.¹ Equipped with a three-dimensional scoreboard and an 18,000 seating capacity, is not the most expensive in the Lone Star Republic.¹ As school budgets continue to increase, states continue to spend more on school athletics.⁵ In the zero-sum budgets of many public education systems, sports drain resources from the classroom, making it no coincidence for states practicing this resource diversion, to have the lowest academic outcome.¹

In addition, high school athletics are adversely affecting the attitudes of student-athletes towards their own education. They often treat their schools as minor-league training grounds instead of institutions for learning. Students and parents spend time and energy chasing scholarships that are over exaggerated; the average N.C.A.A. scholarship being about \$10,409.² Full-rides are rare, leaving many students harmed in the long run because of the educational commitment they sacrificed. University of Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith echoes this phenomenon as she recounted the social pressures pushing children and parents to spend tremendous dollars on athletic events, just to pursue elusive college scholarships.

As high schools increasingly place less emphasis on educational achievement and more

Key Facts:

- High schools located in states that spend the most on sports allocate well over \$50 million dollars towards athletic programs.
- The total value of athletic scholarships granted by universities amounts to \$2 billion dollars, demonstrating the cost and power of sports within educational systems.

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on athletic prowess, they harm the less privileged students and send others on a wild goose chase.⁶

History:

The prominence of athletics in American adolescent culture has existed for generations, with scarce reform efforts aimed at remedying this problem. There was some progress on this issue in Florida, where a debate ensued regarding the allowance of student-athletics from small private schools to play for local schools.⁷

The debate highlights fears of cheating within the program and an overall growing concern with the mammoth influence of athletics on students. The failure of the state to act, however, is indicative of a fear to address this pervasive problem.

Analysis:

The most effective way to accomplish this goal is to prohibit athletes that participate in the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU), or other club leagues, from playing on high school teams. AAU is a non-profit, volunteer, sports organization that is dedicated to promoting amateur athletes in over 34 sports.⁸ It hosts prestigious leagues where elite athletes compete and often become scouted by university teams.

Talking Points:

- The growing costs of high school athletics are funded by the zero-sum budgets of public schools.
- Sports are replacing academics as the main priority for student-athletes.
- The United States is the only nation that funds athletics through public educational institutions.

The most immediate impact of banning AAU players from school teams is that high school leagues would become significantly less competitive, discouraging scouts from watching games and making them less important so education administrators would spend money elsewhere.

Not only would schools economically benefit from this mandate, but also they would also most likely experience better academic outcomes. Schools could divert huge funds previously reserved for athletics towards the classroom via materials like textbooks, libraries, etc. School systems would be better able to foster academic success without the institutional distraction of athletics embedded in education.

This proposal would make American athletic systems similar to those prominent in other parts of the globe. Most other nations, such as Finland, have athletic organiza-

tions completely separate from educational systems.¹ This proposal, however, does not necessarily mean that high school sports would become abolished. Less athletically ambitious students would still participate on school teams, allowing American schools to maintain its promotion of extracurricular skills.

Next Steps:

Considering that high school sports maintain high popularity and have become a norm in the American adolescent experience, reform will not be speedy. In order to increase awareness of this issue, proponents of this proposal should contact local representatives so that high school sports can at least be present on a political agenda. Leaders should be informed of the problems that high school sports pose and the benefits a solution will create. Progress must be generated from the bottom-up, and supporters of change must be vocal.

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Betraying Prometheus: The Duplicity of the Louisiana Voucher System

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Governor Bobby Jindal's Voucher Plan markets snake oil as a healing elixir. His gambit further dismantles the failing public school system and veils fundamentalist Christian proselytization. Jindal throws the good meat back on the fire and snuffs the hearth, backtracking everything Prometheus did for mankind.

Background:

This summer, Louisiana Republican Governor Bobby Jindal ruffled the feathers of the pelican state as he muscled his controversial education plan through the state legislature. Mirroring VP nominee Paul Ryan's plot for healthcare, Jindal's efforts marry the private sector with education via a voucher system where families can shop for schools like cereals at a supermarket.

Key Facts:

- Religious institutions like the Light City Church of the Prophets, can receive up to \$700,000 a year from Jindal's voucher system.
- America ranks 25th in math, 17th in science, and 14th in reading compared to other countries.

Jindal's stratagem offers full-ride access for underprivileged families to a menu of 120 private schools ranging from the prestigious to the religious. Eligible students for these vouchers will be from low-to-middle-income families who attend public schools "where at least 25 percent of students test below" the grade level and whose households earn up to "250 percent of the poverty line," or \$57,625 for a family of four.¹ A mini-voucher system begins next year in 2013, which sweeps additional underprivileged students under the private wing. This next phase extends the constituent pool to any student at any "income bracket," and expands the siphon to funding classes or apprenticeships not offered in the public schools.² This includes online classes, private tutors, industry trade groups, etc., so students can pursue academic interests not satisfied by public schools.

The debate on vouchers has attracted groups from across the American geopolitical landscape, catching educational, religious, political advocacy, and other groups into the orbit of debate. Supporters of the program tout the parents' right to choose and the government's responsibility to optimize education spending. Separating state from education, according to the Cato Institute, would "liberate education from bureaucrats and politicians," thus making schools more efficient by eliminating red-tape

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and address “the plight of children in inner-city schools.”³ Louisiana Superintendent of Schools John White echoes these cries as he highlights the government’s hypocrisy of forcing parents to send their children to public schools when those institutions are cesspools “where two-third of the students can’t read or [do] math at grade level.”⁴ Infuriated opponents decry the fragmentary nature of the voucher system and a lack of accountability for the private voucher schools. It schisms the educational system and makes it “more Balkanized than it already is.”⁵ This same resonance inoculates Reuters journalist Stephanie Simon’s piece about the removal of “one child from a public school classroom” and how that “merely siphons off resources for that school,” ultimately hurting other students.⁶ The debate gets more heated when discussion religious institutions included in the Voucher plan. Each side remains stonewalled opposite the other, making conciliation an insurmountable task.

History:

Private schools are corporate entities under private management (corporations, religious individuals, citizens), and not new to the American landscape. Catholic missionaries (ancestral private schools) opened doors for spiritual education at the same time that Massachusetts created schools for the public under its Massachusetts Public Law (1647).⁷ After a dark period during industrialization, the popularity of private schools soared once again during the Cold War. The private school enrollment increased by 118% nation-wide as compared to the public school’s 36% growth; the private sector possessed 13.6% of the total elementary-secondary school population in the 1959-1960 academic year.⁸ Just like the public schools, these private institutions churned out learned citizens to continue American democracy and savvy businessmen to continue American capitalism.

The contention with Governor Jindal’s Voucher System is not over private schools in general, but by the policy resurrected in the Governor’s efforts: ‘school choice.’ EDUCATION WEEK summarizes this idea as basically “a reform movement focused on affording parents the right to choose which school their child attends,” exuding the American tenant of providing selection.⁹ The No Child Left Behind Act (2001) brought the policy into the federal sphere by providing “educational options for many families” including tutoring, safer or more successful public schools, and supporting “the growth of more independent charter schools,” but was quickly defeated because of issues regarding the separation of church and state.¹⁰ Now, like a bear, it has served its winter of discontent and reemerged from its dormancy.

Analysis:

Our educational system is in desperate need of reform-the United States of America cannot exist on a system that consistently fails its own students. The National

Assessment of Educational Progress presented a shameful ¾ of tested high school students failing to show proficiency in our own history: only 18%.¹¹ It is logical to conceptualize the openness towards the Voucher system because it promises greater choice of schools and a decrease of the bloated educational budget, but the system is barren of any benefit.

By providing alternate education, the voucher system vows to save money

for the state. Louisiana Board Member of Elementary and Secondary Education, James Garvey argues that the vouchers will in fact “reduce the cost of educating the students who use them because the average private tuition is lower than the state per-pupil allotment.”¹² While this is true—private schools often charge \$3,000-\$5,000 which is less than the public school average of \$8,800 a year—Simon’s article in Reuters reveals additional unspecified fees that bring the student tab close to the \$8,800 price tag, presenting no alleviation for the state.¹³ In addition, the exodus of students reduces the capacity of public schools to teach the ones ‘left behind.’ The American Federation of Teachers reiterates that “public funding of private or religious education transfers precious tax dollars from public schools,” leaving less money to pay for fixed utilities and custodial costs, which remain the same whether a child is there half day or all day.¹⁴ Soon a vicious cycle begins where the public schools lose funding and can no longer provide working environments for their students, forcing more students to leave, and more public school cutbacks.

What supporters seem to gloss over in this debate is the issue regarding any measurement of accountability the private schools have to the student/family, state, and country. Jindal’s 47-page bill requires the superintendent of schools, White in this case, to create an ‘accountability system’ which can only be altered via legislative vote.¹⁵ White satisfied this requirement by analyzing and approving the classes offered by the 120 private schools, but his efforts are not enough. Besides coursework inquiry, White leaves principles to self-assess that “their curriculum covers all subjects kids need.”¹⁶ However, private schools hold their students to different standards than the state. Private schools are not required to “give their students state standardized tests,” leaving no “straightforward way for parents to judge” student performance.¹⁷ Each private school has different standards and criteria, leaving them as checkered across the districts as the colonies under the Articles of Confederation and without any formalized process to monitor those private schools that underachieve.

The gravest circumstance White’s loose ‘accountability system’ permits is the inclusion

Talking Points:

- The American Educational system is in desperate need of reform.
- The Louisiana Voucher System does not save money for the state, has no accountability, and includes fundamentalist religious schools.
- The idea of voucher programs is constitutionally sound, but there needs to be more governmental regulation of selected schools.

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of religious institutions. In 2002, the Supreme Court (surprisingly and unsurprisingly) condoned the voucher gambit's inclusion of religious schools by classifying it as part of 'school choice,' circumventing the Establishment Clause by marking the voucher artifice as a secular endeavor that does not show favoritism to any private or religious institution.¹⁸ Nevertheless, Jindal's Voucher plan does favor certain religious institutions over other Abrahamic religious school, and it is these institutions that abuse it by indoctrinating their students in anti-science and anti-history dogma. According to TPM, the Islamic School of Greater Orleans was bullied into pulling its 38 voucher offers because Representative Kenneth Harvard, R-Jackson, said he "objected to any funding of 'Islamic Teaching.'"¹⁹ The objection of Representative Harvard comes from a fear of fundamentalist education that breeds rancor and violence. It is interesting to note that he assigns this stereotype to the Islamic schools, when fundamental Christian schools are included in the voucher system without a second look. At Eternity Christian Academy in Westlake, pastor-turned-principle Marie Carrier forces her first-through-eighth graders to sit at cubicles and brave Christian textbooks refuting evolution when introducing science and biology as made by God.²⁰ It has gotten so bad that the textbooks blame liberals for global crises, adding an ideological slant to its subversive indoctrination. Government money, and the taxpayer's hard-earned dollars, are being used for schools that refuse to acknowledge biblical historicity and teach theology as science. Many of these schools use the Beka Book Curriculum, or Bob Jones University Press textbooks, which has published books condemning homosexuals as having "no more claims to special rights than child molesters or rapists," math having no place in modern society, and that "Dinosaurs and humans were definitely on earth at the same time and may have lived side by side."²¹ This system is a nice try for reforming education, but it is contradictory in its support and nurtures schools antithetical to a democratic society.

Next Steps:

Educational privatization is fine because in America, one does have the right to choose his/her education, if given the proper means. Yet, if public money is being used there must be more governmental intervention to ensure taxpayer money is used properly. Therefore, this Voucher system should require its private school components comply with federal education standards, or at least become members of the National Association of Independent Schools, so parents can judge student progress. More importantly, this plan must take a harder line with religious institutions and *demand* they teach a more compatible allegorical biblical interpretation instead of insurrectionary fundamentalist dogma.

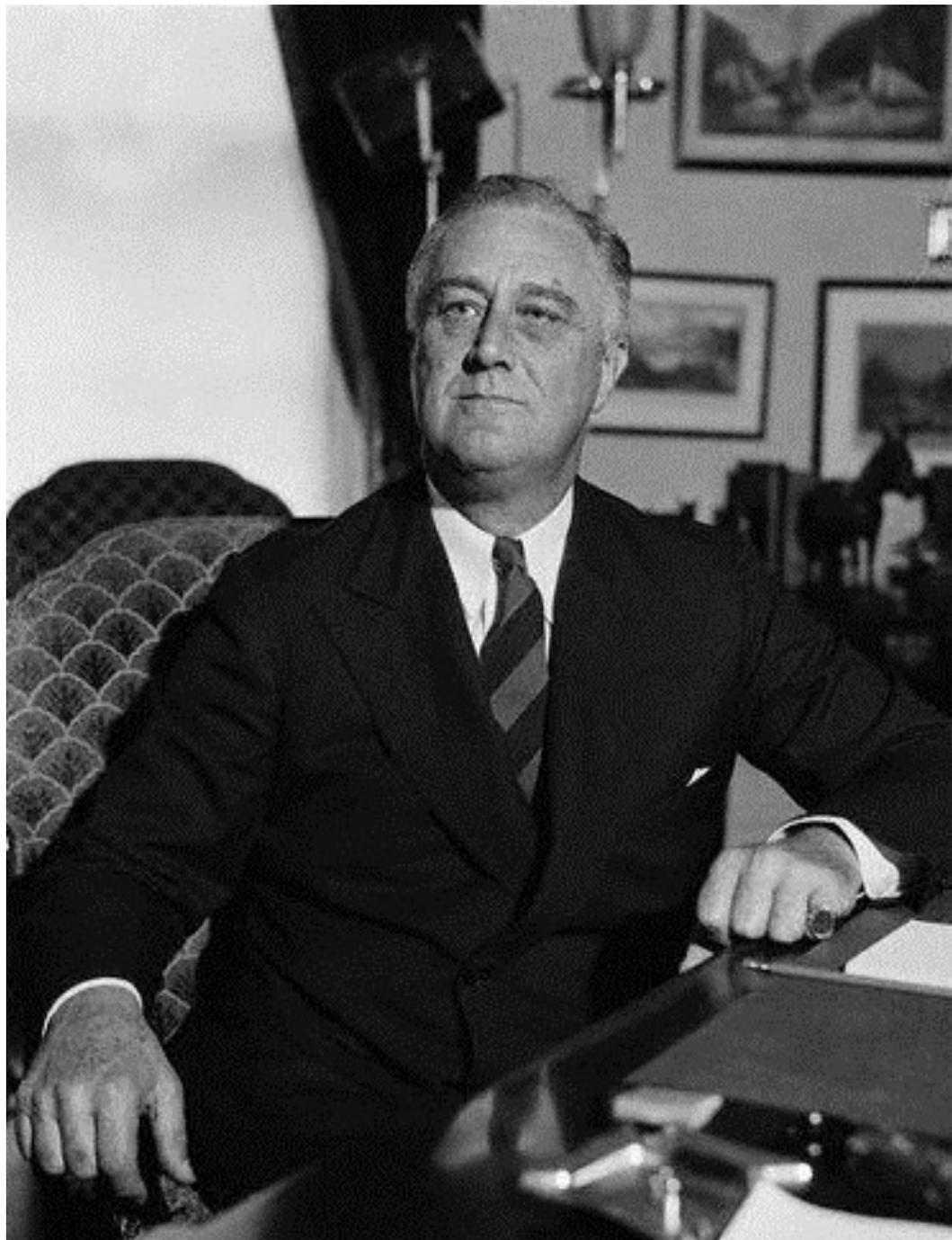
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