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Schools, Vouchers, and the American Public, by Terry M. Moe

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As Catholic educators and people of faith, we have a right and a duty to pursue the truth, who is Christ. There is a traditional distinction between the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ or as Sacrament, which is distinguished from the sinful impulses and poor behavior of some of its members. We can all learn from this book the need to speak truth with love and to take responsibility for our actions. Like steel to the stone, this is a challenging read that is sure to spark conversation about Church, leadership, and our role as educators. We will undoubtedly need to continue this discussion to clear the path for God's Word to be seen in all its brilliance.

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SCHOOLS, VOUCHERS, AND THE AMERICAN PUBLIC

TERRY M. MOE, BROOKINGS INSTITUTION PRESS, 2001.

Reviewed by Salvatore Ferrera

A greater service to the voucher movement could not be rendered than Terry Moe's *Schools, Vouchers, and the American Public*, which proves that vouchers and public education can not only co-exist, but also co-prosper. Rather than depicting public education and vouchers as mutually hostile, the author makes much of the accurate perception that the American public, across each and every ethnic and racial boundary, like both public schools and vouchers. And the author documents this news with a broad-based, national survey.

Inherent in the analysis is the realization that former voucher advocates stressed the economic forces of the educational marketplace and, by doing so, raised hackles and built barricades, when both were unnecessary. Rather than belabor the market mechanism, voucher advocates should stress benefits to those parts of the school population clearly underserved by the educational system. These parts include minorities and inner city students.

The author's breadth of analysis is far reaching. Not only are poll results used, but polls are analyzed across perceptive, if sometimes delicate, fault lines of race, ethnicity, religion, and income. This type of analysis knocks the wind out of the usual rich versus poor, Black versus White, and educated versus uneducated punching bags automatically strung up across the gym of public opinion.

The author's call for a nationwide voucher initiative is blessed with good methodology, better results, and a keen analysis of political trends. Moreover, he covers his subject in 10 well-written chapters, neatly tied together in a

conclusion which itself contains a battle plan for voucher strategists intent on winning the battle for nationwide voucher systems. I cannot agree with everything he says, but I admire the way he says it.

Chapter one is the obligatory overview, but dynamically written as a political narrative of the history of vouchers, centered in the Milwaukee experiment adopted by other school systems. One gets the impression that Moe believes the voucher movement to be more political than economic: in this, he is probably right, though educational merit must, per force, be in the balance as well.

Chapters two through four are data-sensitive analysis chapters, rooted in Moe's belief that public school performance might be inefficient, but the American public are too sentimental about the present school system to do away with it by the medium of vouchers. These chapters articulate Moe's grand strategic concept: Both vouchers and the present system can coexist and do well together. Moe tells us that a mixed voucher and conventional public system is the way to go, and in this, he has the company of most Americans.

Chapter five addresses the decision to go private, with the chapter title: "The Attraction of Private Schools." But it seems that most of the decisions surrounding educational choice are social, not economic or even educational. This plays into the hands of those espousing the belief that social desires must take a back seat to educational concerns. It further bolsters the belief, as maintained by the NAACP, that at the heart of vouchers is segregation rather than education.

Chapter six assays public opinion, which seems to be largely ignorant of the deeper issues of vouchers versus the present system. This is somewhat patronizing, but Moe seems to indicate that lack of full knowledge of vouchers as a change system saps the strength of the argument for vouchers.

In chapter seven, Moe measures the bedrock support for vouchers across all conceivable lines of class, race, ethnicity, income, and region. How "ignorant" the population is, as recounted in chapter six, is taken into account. Moe still makes his case, with a dynamic population, informed or not.

The eighth chapter is prescient as to how vouchers will change the educational environment. It assumes, in arguendo, that the wrenching change of vouchers might be absorbed more readily than previously thought. In fact, Moe implies that the more voucher advocates depict the change of vouchers, the more popular resistance to vouchers hardens and spreads to classes and peoples more logically predisposed to this change. This is a crucial chapter. In effect, Moe asks for the infiltration of vouchers, not a full assault. Not a bad strategy.

Chapter nine depicts vouchers not as a single entity, but as part of a family of choices tailored to the at-risk population. The anti-voucher lobby is weakened by splitting its opposition among many options; renouncing one at-

risk population, say the learning disabled, but not the poor, Blacks, or inner city schools.

The final chapter discusses the political future of vouchers and considers the possible outcomes of the upcoming Supreme Court decision on "whether vouchers for religious schools violate the separation of church and state" (p. 391). Moe might be as wrong as he is right, but the premise of the book is that vouchers, properly advocated and well inaugurated, will not just live, but prosper. More to the point, they will do so without suffocating public education.

Moe's book is a must-read not merely for the arcane educational market, but also for American policy makers and opinion makers seeking to grapple with the basic issue of vouchers, divorced from the usual squabbles of economic analysis, racial educational profiling, and heated invective.

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