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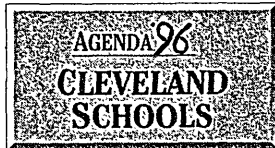
More vouchers than openings

Suburban districts' reluctance to welcome city students requires the attention of state and local officials

At first glance, an athletic arena proved the perfect venue to open Ohio's experiment in vouchers. Eyes wide and shoulders hunched forward with anticipation, the hundreds seated between flashing scoreboards last week appeared as eager as any fans. Those in charge of the event could barely wait to begin the cheers.

On that day, at least, opponents were absent. Dismissed for the moment were the court filings and press conferences of recent weeks, the claims that the pilot program represented a betrayal of Cleveland schoolchildren — or at least of basic constitutional principles. A judge might block the voucher measure before it begins, but the parents and principals gathered for an orientation session at Cleveland State University's Convocation Center did not focus on such dim prospects. They spoke instead of the chances their children would have to attend schools better-suited to youngsters' needs.

And yet as the morning wore on, a shadow began to spread. Many might have been inspired by Principal Lydia Harris' talk about St. Adalbert's Elementary School, a state administrator acknowledged, but that school surely could not accept all of the new students who might want to attend. Truth to tell, application forms asked guardians to rank fully a half-dozen school choices, and even then organizers might have to ask parents to



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consider still other options.

The pilot program made 1,500 vouchers available, but none could say this month whether as many private or parochial school slots would open. One particularly optimistic speaker suggested that parents themselves start now to develop schools that could open this fall.

One alternative is already all but eliminated. Although the legislature's proposal suggested that suburban public schools might open spots for city students, so far not a single superintendent even has expressed interest. The chief reason cited is cost: Although participating public districts would receive more than the \$2,500 total available to private schools, the tuition paid by the state probably would fall short of covering a suburban district's per-pupil costs. The argument is understandable: in these days of fiscal conservatism, even school officials who support this controversial proposal would be foolish to ask taxpayers to subsidize students from outside their own system. Even so, the result — more limited choices for parents — is no less regrettable.

As a first-year outing, this effort is sure to see more than a few setbacks. But officials should start to make adjustments now so that its second year can be more expansive — and thus come still closer to its aim of improved educational opportunities for urban children.

Able to collect

Anyone who says crime doesn't pay should take a look at a couple of Ohio's public employee pension funds.

Last year, Plain Dealer reporter Mark Tatge documented how more than a dozen northeast Ohio police officers retired on disability pensions after they were found guilty of committing crimes. Now the public is treated to the repugnant case of David A. Lawrence.

Lawrence was a sex-education teacher in the suburban-Columbus school system of Reynoldsburg until he was forced to resign after years of giving students the wrong kind of hands-on experience.

The state Board of Education found that Lawrence "engaged in inappropriate romantic and sexual relationships with at least five female students from 1975 through 1991." He also allegedly smoked marijuana with teens.

Lawrence faced no criminal charges because the statute of limitations had run out.



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Mercifully, he resigned last February.

But last week, the State Teachers Retirement System board reversed an earlier ruling and decided to award Lawrence, 49, a disability pension because a psychologist ruled that he is mentally ill.

The board says it has little choice but to grant a disability pension once a doctor rules that a teacher can no longer teach because of illness.

That should change. There is no way that a man who used a position of authority to prey upon young girls should be entitled to a tax-free disability pension of \$38,760 a year.

State Auditor Jim Petro said last week that he would push for legislation to give pension boards the power to deny benefits to public employees who commit crimes.

Sounds like a no-brainer. Whether the offender is a crooked cop or a teacher with an overactive libido, someone who abuses the public trust — and in this case the trust of parents and the morals of children — should pay a penalty. A reward of the sort Lawrence will get should be out of the question.

Building a better marketplace

Fans of the West Side Market should be heartened that Mayor Michael R. White has decided to study ways to raise its profile and its profits.

The market already appeals to fresh-food lovers and history buffs, but the city hopes it can spur some interest among another important group — tourists.

It is easily accessible by car, a manageable walk from Tower City and across the street from a rapid transit station. It has an array of meats, cheeses, fruits and vegetables, and spices from all over the world. A visit on Saturday, the height of marketing week, is a shoulder-to-shoulder, stroller-gridlock shopping event conducted in at least two languages — Spanish and English.

And yet Cleveland's market isn't a national draw like its better-known counterparts in Seattle, Los Angeles and Philadelphia — the so-called festival marketplaces that draw out-of-town visitors like fruit flies.

With the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Jacobs Field becoming major tourist draws, it's important that the city's older attractions not be overlooked.

The mayor's yearlong study is to produce recommendations for putting the market on the map. Among the ideas to be considered are a takeover by a nonprofit agency, a change in hours to accommodate shoppers who have to work during the day, and some construction to protect the goods of the fruit and vegetable vendors. Currently these vendors survive under a makeshift cover just outside of the market and must set up and dismantle their equipment daily.

Some suggestions envision bringing in other kinds of shops as companions to the food stalls. That would help broaden the market's appeal, but the visionaries must take care not to ruin its primary allure as a food bazaar in the heart of the city.

Oliver Spellman, city director of Parks, Recreation and Properties, promises that the committee will include vendors — and that's important. It's the only way to make certain that the committee's work bring the city and the vendors, who often see each other as adversaries, closer to their mutual goal of improving the market.



Letters

Barbara Jordan: Lessons we still need to learn

It is both fitting and necessary to note with perspective the passing of Barbara Jordan at this critical time in our nation's affairs, because of the lessons she tried so diligently to teach us.

We heard her eloquent voice at the 1974 House impeachment hearings when she spoke of her "whole, complete and total faith in the Constitution" and warned that she would not be "an idle spectator to the diminution, the subversion, (or) the destruction" of that document and the system it embodies.

We also listened to her impassioned, resonating speech at the 1976 Democratic Party convention, when she called upon us to be one nation, not a "collection of interest groups: city against suburb, region against region, individual against individual, each wanting to satisfy private wants." With tragic foresight, she asked, "If that happens, who then will speak for America?"

In much the same vein, some of us heard her words only a few months ago as she counseled against the polarization of people of different races in the wake of the Simpson trial.

As thoughtful and moderate political leaders like Sens. Hatfield, Nunn and Cohen virtually flee the halls of Congress and one party's radical right seems bent on invoking its own inequitable and disturbing agenda for America, we need more than ever to recall her lessons.

She also said:

"What are those of us who are elected public officials supposed to do? I'll tell you this: We as public servants must set an example for the rest of the nation. It is hypocritical for the public official to admonish and exhort the people to uphold the common good if we are derelict in upholding the common good. More is required of public officials than slogans and handshakes and press releases. More is required. We must hold ourselves strictly accountable. We must provide the people with a vision of the future."

It is not too late for Barbara Jordan's lessons to be learned.

HOWARD R. BESSER
Shaker Heights

A case of cash vs. trash?

Recently, an Internet provider deleted all sex-related files (7 percent of its total) to escape possible financial loss via a crack-down on such files. Also, it has been reported that trash talk shows survive because most viewers watch them. In one case, "trash" loses; in the other, it wins. Why? Because of money. Unfortunately, in our society, money wins over morality.

CARL W. WENDORFF
Cleveland Heights

An assured good value in charitable donations

Recently, The Plain Dealer ran a series of articles about professional fund-raising businesses that take advantage of people's generosity. According to The Plain Dealer stories, some of these businesses — for their own profit — skimmed close to 75 percent of the money they raised in the name of charity. Certainly not all of these businesses are disreputable. The Plain Dealer presented a balanced report, pointing out the good work of the reputable fund-raising businesses.

All of us who volunteer for long-standing, legitimate charitable organizations applaud The Plain Dealer for exposing the charlatans. Their dishonesty only makes our efforts to raise money for people in need that much more difficult.

People in our community need to know, however, that there are many nonprofit organizations that are good investments. One of these organizations is the United Way.

Our entire overhead is 12.5 percent. That's lower than the average of the more than 2,000 independent United Ways around the country. It is far lower than the 25 percent overhead accepted by the National Charities Information Bureau, which is the fiscal watchdog of charitable organizations.

Our 300 volunteers who serve on what we call our Citizen Review Committees act as your "charitable investment brokers." They personally visit each of the more than 140 local health and human-service agencies we support. They pore over the budgets and scrutinize the financial records. They interview the professionals who provide help and the people who get help. They make sure you're getting the best possible return on your charitable investment.

Our impact on the community is powerful. Our United Way-supported programs are helping more than 400,000 people every year. That's about one out of every four people living in our commu-

nity. We are second in support of human care services only to the government.

Our stability is without equal. Since 1913, United Way — under many different names and symbols — has been bringing people together to help others and one another. We'll be here to help next year and next century.

Each year, our annual fund raising campaign undergoes a financial audit by an independent accounting firm. Volunteers, who are professionals in the finance area, serve on our oversight committees and approve organizational expenditures. Our staff compensations are regularly reviewed.

So, we hope The Plain Dealer series has created a healthy skepticism about charitable giving, and not a cynicism about organized charities.

As the follow-up editorial advised, when someone representing one of these fund-raising businesses calls you at home, ask them to "put it in writing." If you get the run-around, call United Way. We can offer you a good investment opportunity.

What return will you get from your United Way investment? You'll get a strong community in which to live and work. You'll get a community where young people will have the benefit of clubs and activities in their neighborhoods; a community where families will have the benefit of dependable, affordable day care; a community where older adults can get together for friendship and food at a neighborhood center. You'll get our money's worth 400,000 times over — a dividend for each person you have helped. And we'll put that in writing.

WILLIAM R. ROBERTSON
Cleveland

Robertson is the president of National City Corp. and the volunteer chairman of the board for the Cleveland-area United Way Services.

Teachers dispute charge of 'hypocrisy'

It was unfortunate that in a Plain Dealer article on Jan. 11, Gov. George V. Voinovich perpetuates the myth that public-school teachers are "hypocritical" to oppose school vouchers to private schools "when studies of 1990 Census data indicate 39.7 percent of Cleveland teachers" send their children to nonpublic schools.

The study referred to was done by the Center for Education Reform and has since been debunked. For example, no data describe where public school teachers working in central cities send their children to school because census data describe only where teachers live, not where they work. The mismatch of residency and employment excludes approximately one-third of big-city teachers who send their children to public schools in commu-

nities in which they live.

What the data does show is that nationwide 91.6 percent of public school teachers use public schools for all or some of their children. This is better than the general public, which has 89.9 percent using public schools. Further, three out of four private school teachers use public schools for all or some of their children. Does this make them "hypocrites" as well?

The governor should check the reliability of his sources before making rash and misleading statements.

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Marec is president of the Ohio Federation of Teachers.

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