

School News & Notes

School Choice: Would It Help Teachers?

by Mike Antonucci

(NAPSA)—While the District of Columbia public schools may rank last in the nation in math and reading for both fourth and eighth grades, they do not rank at the bottom of every educational category.

The district ranks first in per-pupil spending with \$13,525—nearly \$2,500 more per-student than second-place New York.

The average D.C. teacher made \$48,704 last year, good enough for seventh in the nation. But this amount is reduced by about 1.5 percent because of the dues each teacher pays to the Washington Teachers Union (WTU).

During the summer of 2002, these teachers noticed something seriously wrong with their paychecks. Instead of a deduction of \$16 for union dues, there was a deduction of \$160. What seemed to be a simple clerical error turned out to be the first crack in an alleged seven-year-old conspiracy to rob and defraud the District's union members. Before long, three federal agencies were investigating the alleged misappropriation of more than \$5 million in dues.

FBI agents eventually seized \$500,000 worth of custom-made clothing, a 50" plasma television, a 288-piece antique sterling silver set and other goods—all allegedly purchased with union dues.

Corruption can occur anywhere, but monopolies—districts where teachers must belong to a union—make it much easier for corruption to go undetected and unpunished.

A new proposal by President



A White House proposal would use \$75 million to support a school voucher program in Washington, D.C.

Bush would use \$75 million in new funds to support a school choice pilot program in the District of Columbia. Parents whose income falls below the poverty line would get up to \$5,000 in vouchers to send their children to the school of their choice.

This proposal would provide some welcome relief to parents who are tired of their children receiving a substandard education at Tiffany prices. If it succeeds, many D.C. teachers would follow their students, exercising their own school choice. Such an exodus of the union's "consumers" would more effectively police union spending and end corruption than any government regulation.

To read more about teachers' unions and school choice, visit www.friedmanfoundation.org, the Web site of the Milton & Rose D. Friedman Foundation.