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# F·O·R·U·M

EDUCATION AND EDUCATION REFORM  
AN IN-DEPTH DIALOGUE

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INSTITUTE OF POLITICS  
UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

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E X E C U T I V E S U M M A R Y

**O**n January 26, 1996, the Institute of Politics held a roundtable discussion with experts in the area of education on issues related to education and education reform. Moderator Peter Shane, Dean of the University of Pittsburgh School of Law, began the discussion by asking whether our current system of education “makes sense” given that it “originated out of a fairly specific vision of a way in which student citizens would be brought together and educated in a particular route to adulthood.”

Although there was consensus that schools are in need of reform, perceptions about the root of the problem and resultant solutions varied. Tom Murrin, Dean of the Duquesne University Business School, supported the notion of benchmarking the principles of American schools with global competitors (such as Japan and Germany), and instituting practices such as national standards. Ron Cowell, Member of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives, responded by saying that although benchmarking and national standards were good ideas, they were impractical. Cowell explained “we have to accomplish our [educational] goals in an environment that is totally different from Japan’s,” and added that the public responded vitriolically to the idea of national standards.

Ronald Bowes, Assistant Superintendent for Public Policy and Development for the Catholic Schools and the Diocese of Pittsburgh, and Ronald Tomalis, Executive Deputy Secretary for the Pennsylvania Department of Education, both expressed concern about schools’ ability to implement reform in a system that is “monopolistic and not challenged from within.” Also of concern to Bowes and Tomalis, was the fact that poor and working class people are seldom able to exercise

choice in directing their child’s education.

Underlying this analysis is vouchers. There was little agreement, among the participants, as to the efficacy and future of vouchers. However, there was agreement that there are other educational reforms that could be implemented which are less divisive. These included: charter school legislation, equity financing, and modifications in teacher certification.

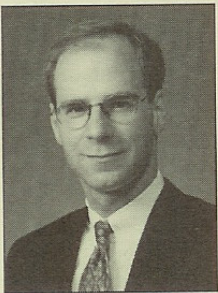
Adding yet another interpretation was Helen Faison, Distinguished Professor of Education at Chatham College, and retired Deputy Superintendent of the Pittsburgh Public Schools, who agreed that schools are not adequately preparing young people for the future, but did not see the problem residing within the schools: “To fault the schools is to place the blame wrongly.” She suggested that problems can be found within the context of local control and inadequate funding, as well as within issues related to the changing economy and problems associated with large urban communities.

Toward implementing real reform, Shane suggested that the action might be in the “breaking down of ideological barriers” so that problems can be explored outside of the constraints found within vested interests.

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I N T R O D U C T I O N S

**MOE COLEMAN:** Hello, I'm Moe Coleman, Director of the Institute of Politics, and I want to welcome everybody to this FORUM. The issue of education choice is a major question on the public agenda. The Institute's function is an educational one—here people can offer serious and differing points of view on important issues.

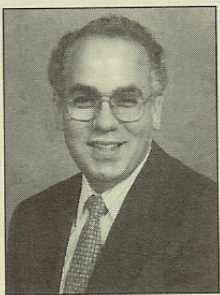
**PETER SHANE:** It was suggested that we begin by introducing ourselves around the table.



T O M A L I S

**RON TOMALIS:** I'm Executive Deputy Secretary of the Department of Education. In that capacity I function as the chief of staff to Secretary Hickok, the Secretary of Education. I joined the Ridge administration in May. Prior to that I served at the Department of Justice for 10 years in a variety of capacities that took me all over the country and to interesting places such as Cuba and Haiti. I was born and raised in Pennsylvania.

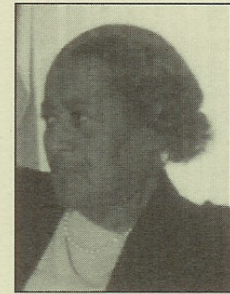
**MARIANN KRUSHEFSKI:** I'm the Governor's Representative for Southwestern Pennsylvania. Our office is based in Pittsburgh and serves the southwest region which is primarily a 13-county area. In this position I act as the region's most immediate and direct connection from here to Harrisburg and the Governor and back again. (Ms. Krushefski was not a formal participant in the discussion.)



S H A N E

**PETER SHANE:** I'm the Dean of the University of Pittsburgh School of Law. Prior to that I taught at the University of Iowa College of Law. My general areas of expertise are constitutional and administrative law. In my pre-academic life I was a lawyer in the Justice Department Office of Legal Counsel in the Office of Management and Budget in Washington. If I have a claim to being here, it is from when I was an undergraduate at Harvard. The focus of my study there was the history of American education, and my senior thesis was on the politics of the Boston School Committee.

**HELEN FAISON:** I am a former Deputy Superintendent for Pittsburgh Public Schools, a school district in which I worked for 43 years. Since then I have been associated with Chatham College's Education Department. Having attended segregated schools as a child, and high school and college in an integrated setting, I bring those experiences and my experience as an educator to this discussion. I was graduated from Pittsburgh High School and received all of my post-secondary education at the University of Pittsburgh.



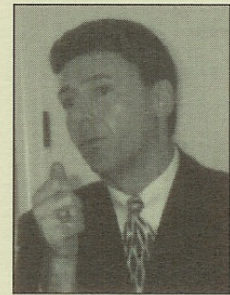
F A I S O N

**TOM MURRIN:** To use my wife's characterization, I'm the person around the table who can't keep a job. I've been in industry at Westinghouse for 36 years. I should add that things were going well at Westinghouse back then. I spent two fascinating and frustrating years in Washington, DC as the Deputy Secretary of Commerce, and now some fascinating years as Business School Dean at Duquesne University. I would like to contribute a little bit with my former business hat on. Having been in more than 40 countries and having lived overseas, I have seen the critical importance, especially in terms of global competitiveness, of world-class education.



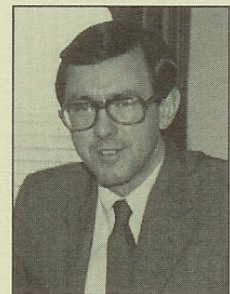
M U R R I N

**RON BOWES:** I came to Pittsburgh from New York. I attended Duquesne University and then served as a casualty officer during the Vietnam War. When I returned to Pittsburgh I taught at Gladstone High School, which began a career of 23 years of teaching in the city of Pittsburgh. I have also spent a great deal of time teaching at Western Penitentiary at night. As of 1991, I am the Assistant Superintendent for Public Policy and Development for the Catholic Schools and the Diocese of Pittsburgh.



B O W E S

**RON COWELL:** I'm a Pitt graduate and for 22 years a Member of the House of Representatives, representing the 34th District here in Allegheny County. Currently I'm the Democratic Chairman of the House Education Committee and a member of the State Board of Education.



C O W E L L



DISCUSSION

**SHANE:** I want to suggest an agenda of questions that is relevant to the general topic of educational reform and includes issues of school choice.

When I contemplate the field of education, I think of myself as a layperson. I have not taught in a K-through-12 setting, and I have not had to make rules or regulations with respect to the policies that our schools are subject to; but, as a citizen, a couple of things always occur to me as I think about the educational system.

First, I think that there are few aspects of any society that will tell you more about the character of that society than its school system. The way in which we think about our enterprise as a community—as a society—is embodied in the tasks we give our schools and the way we structure them. One general issue that I hope will run through the discussion is how specific reforms, whether you are for them or against them, speak to the more general vision of what our educational system should be. The kind of public school system we have now, originated out of a fairly specific vision of a way in which student citizens would be brought together and educated in a particular route towards adulthood. Does that vision still make sense? Did it ever make sense? Was it ever successful? Could it be successful again?

The second area has to do with students and communities. Discussion here attracts a lot of passion, and for good reason. I think people who are in the education business approach their mission as if souls were at stake—both the souls of our students, who are becoming through the educational process, the people they will be for their entire lives, and the souls of the communities we serve.

My question is where do you think we are in all of this? That is, what are the most pressing issues we ought to be confronting? Additionally, how would you know a good proposal for school reform if you saw it? For that matter, how would you know a good system of education if you

saw it, and what are the things that we ought to look at as measures for the type of school system we ought to have? Helen, do you want to start?

**FAISON:** As I was thinking about the topic, I thought about why we need to reform our schools. We have all come to a recognition that schools, as they now operate, are not adequately preparing some of our young people. It has been said of our schools that they have changed a lot for the people who work in them—they are much better places for people to work, but they have changed little in terms of meeting the needs of children.

I am not so certain that schools have not changed; it is just that the world has changed so much. It used to be that there wasn't a great deal of concern about what would become of people once they left school. Certain students were prepared well for their futures, but there were places in society for those people who weren't particularly successful in the schools. We know now that that is no longer true. We have a growing number of young people who leave school and are unable to succeed. We are placing the blame for that on the schools.

Now to get back to something that our moderator said, I think if we look at the history of education in this country, we know that we think of schools as being free, public, universal, comprehensive in their scope, meeting the needs of all children; and, if financed by the public, non-sectarian. Schools, we have believed, should also respond to the basic needs of reading, writing, and arithmetic; and we have added at least one other basic, computer technology. We are looking for ways that we can better prepare all of our young people for life after school.

**MURRIN:** Your question of how do we know how to evaluate a school system proposal, is a challenging one. Perhaps we might apply some of the fundamentals of TQM (total quality management) that

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“ TO PRESERVE THE REASONS WHY I LOVE PITTSBURGH AND SOUTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA, I THINK, FRANKLY, WE HAVE TO DO MORE AND MORE OF WHAT [JAPAN AND GERMANY] ARE DOING IN THEIR SCHOOL SYSTEMS. ”

—TOM MURRIN

are finally getting a lot of attention in our country. TQM might then drive us to the simple, but powerful procedure of benchmarking; that is, seeking out and learning from the best educational institutions and organizations in the United States and around the world.

The world aspect is important because our children—like it or not—are going to be interfacing with, competing with, and hopefully, on occasion, partnering with talented, well-educated individuals from many, many countries.

I expect we all know we wouldn't have to go very much further than Japan and Germany to benchmark. But, to preserve the reasons why I love Pittsburgh and Southwestern Pennsylvania, I think, frankly, we have to do more and more of what they are doing in their school systems. Their school systems are much more demanding.

In Japan, students spend a third more hours a year in the classrooms than do our students. Coming out of high school, the typical Japanese graduate (you can talk about a typical Japanese graduate because they've all followed the same basic curriculum) is bilingual, has taken what we would consider quite advanced courses in math and science, and has the equivalent of two or three years of our typical college education. That gives them, in my judgment with my business hat on, a frightful advantage in their factories, offices, and laboratories.

If we don't study what they do, adapt it to our needs and interests, and compete with them, we're not going to be able to sustain our relatively high standard of living and maintain our hard-earned influence in the world. We can say the same about Germany and increasingly many other countries.

We do have a large number of folks who are tremendously intelligent, have an incredible work ethic, and a commitment to world-class education. So I would suggest a key pretest would be to do some benchmarking and compare us against them.

**BOWES:** When we talk about access, when we talk about accountability, when we talk about education, we're talking about good schools. The questions then are: What is a good school? Where are they? How do we get all children to good schools, be they public or non-public? The important issue here is educating children, and that should be the issue.

I think research demonstrates what good schools are. We know that they are a community, have a focus, and have a strong academic core of subjects or an emphasis. We know that the professionals in that school know where they are going and believe that they're all in this together. There is an orderly environment, which is conducive to learning. There is enough research to show that we know what good schools are.

The question is, how do we make all schools like the models? The last president said, okay, let's have a thousand models, let's go out there and see what works, and how we can make things better. And, the funny thing is that we already know what works. We know that magnet schools are better than regular schools. Studies by the Rand Corporation and the Reason Foundation found that schools that have a particular, centralized focus are more successful than the general school.

We also know that every school does not fit every child. And why is that? Because each school takes on a particular personality—a particular focus. Most educators know that—especially if you've been down in the trenches.

The solution? I believe that the answer is to instill accountability into all schools. To force and to drive them to model themselves after the schools that are working. Will they be able to do this? Absolutely. Educational professionals are very capable—they've just never been forced, or driven, or had the incentive to do that. I believe that we also can adopt things like TQE, a derivative of TQM, in education. I think that we can do this, but we can only

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—RON BOWES

do it in an environment that's ready to receive it and able to push that forward. Such an environment involves a community of people to provide the force that will enable children to be successful and to move forward.

**COWELL:** I approach the questions from the perspective of a state policy maker. That means that I put emphasis on the fact that across the country, generally, and here in Pennsylvania, in particular, there is a state constitutional obligation to provide for a thorough and efficient system of public education. In fact, that is one of the few mandates from a policy or program standpoint that you'll find in our constitution, or in most state constitutions.

What ought the system to look like? In general terms, I think that we are required to develop a system where all students have access to high-quality education programs. These programs will have challenging standards—standards that challenge students to do their very best—and ultimately graduate students who are prepared to enter the workforce as life-long learners, and as informed and involved citizens.

There are a lot of different opinions on how you accomplish that. Japan is sometimes cited as an example. I was just in Japan two months ago and came away with some impressions. We need to accomplish our goals in an environment that is totally different from Japan's. We don't have a homogeneous society.

In Pennsylvania, when Governor Ridge speaks to the prospect of having school on Saturday to make up days lost because of blizzards and storms, there is outrage from some individuals who argue that this will interfere with their religious practices, or their family practices, or their kids working on Saturday. So the how-to is difficult, but I think that we could probably agree as to what we want to do.

Another pertinent question is what are the public expectations? And I think that as policy makers approach the issue of policy (not so much individual programs,

I think that's often best left to the practitioners at the school level and the community), we need to do so cognizant of the fact that a couple of the most recent major surveys (i.e., a Kaplan survey) suggest that parents and citizens generally are looking for schools that are safe, orderly, and have high standards.

**TOMALIS:** I, too, enter this discussion as a state policy maker, and I believe that this discussion is a discussion that's taking place in a lot of institutions across the country and around a lot of coffee tables and dinner tables. As far as the education system is concerned, it's probably a discussion that is long overdue. In the last 20 or 30 years, we have seen a number of aspects of our society go through major radical transformations. Advances in technologies is just one example.

Education is beginning to take a serious look at itself and beginning a serious transformation. It's not a new debate nor is it a new discussion, but we're beginning to move from a point of discussion to a point of implementation. And in that vein, the bottom line has to be what does the educational system do for the ultimate client—that is, the student, the child. When you look toward reform of any type of public education, you need to introduce reform that will provide the highest quality of education to any student no matter where that student is. That's the bottom line.

We produce a product, an educated student. That product goes out to the business world. The question then is, are we producing a product that can be used. Is that educated student prepared with the skills and the background necessary to compete in the global economy? There's a belief that we're not producing students who will be able to compete.

One of the initiatives that we're trying to do, that we want to look at—and I think that goes to the heart of the whole discussion—is how do you do this type of reform in a system that is, for want of a

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better word, a monopoly? A system that hasn't been challenged from within? We have our state responsibilities, and we will fulfill those responsibilities; but how do you address reform, and how do you incorporate reform into such a system?

**KRUSHEFSKI:** One of the goals that this administration has set is a responsibility for crafting an environment that can promote family-sustaining jobs. Part of the responsibility is to make sure that we're providing what is necessary to realize the economic-development potential, and education is one of those key building blocks that we need to look at. It is important that students will be able to transition through the system in a way that they are able to compete and move into what we hope is going to be a better economic environment.

**SHANE:** Can we focus a little bit on some of the goals that people have stated around the table? I think Ron [Bowes] actually had an agenda that we would all ascribe to. People want schools with an orderly environment, high standards, strong academic emphasis. Having said that, it has been suggested that we want our students to be strong citizens, effective economic actors in the world economy, and life-long learners. One thing that was not mentioned that I will put on the table is that there are a lot of parents who also want the schools to be reinforcers of values—whatever they may be. And these four activities may or may not always work together, and, in fact, they can push and pull in different directions.

Ron Tomalis, you said that parents were afraid that their children will not be able to compete in the world economy, and Tom pretty much emphasized that. But sometimes when I hear parents talk, I hear them say that they are afraid of the world economy, period. They're afraid their kids will learn to compete in the world economy and will be off to some foreign land to do that, and they want their kids to stay closer to home.

Also, people have said, either directly or indirectly, that there's a concern about introducing accountability into basically a monopoly and that does raise the choice issue. At the same time, Tom was talking about national standards—a comprehensive curriculum that everybody follows.

Given this complex set of plausible objectives for schools, I'm wondering if there is a role for choice in all of this, particularly when the choices that parents make may not be guided by the things that we all seem to think good schools ought to do. And, if the parents are making these choices, what does that say with respect to the possibility of national standards or a national curriculum? Should we move in that direction?

**TOMALIS:** I have a great deal of faith that parents will be able to discern what is the best institution for their child, and whether or not a school is a good school. However, I do have some concerns about how parents can impact or exercise their wishes in this. If I live in Block A of any town, I know where my kid goes to school, and there is no ability to impact on what school gets my child. Concurrently, there is no incentive for that school to get more children.

Each school has its own characteristics, and its own abilities to excel in certain areas. Parents should be able to choose which school is the best fit for that child. Introducing parents' decision-making abilities into the education system is critical. Moreover, how do you help parents improve their child's school given that they don't have that much input into the system? The question of accountability and standards is critical, and how it plays in choices is another critical area.

**BOWES:** Well, Ron [Tomalis], for all intents and purposes, that's what those of us with means already do. What we are saying in our society is that poor people are not qualified to select schools or will pick a school for some crazy reason. I say



that, because those of us with means, go where we want to go. It can be by moving to a nice neighborhood with the best school system, or we select a private or parochial school that we can afford. We choose what is going to be best for our children and meets all of our needs, including that which best matches the value system that we want to instill in our child. In creating the monopoly, we left behind those people who cannot afford to make such decisions.

It's really an urban problem more than anything else in the sense that it is the children in the inner cities throughout the United States who are more or less relegated to and trapped in schools that, in many cases, are not responsive to them because they're not clients. There's no incentive for the educational professionals to go the extra step, or for the school to be the kind of schools that we talked about—the good schools.

**SHANE:** Tom, you used the words “national standards.”

**MURRIN:** I won't claim to have any recipe for what exactly we want to do and how to do it. Let me just suggest a couple of factors and then make two suggestions that really come out of some recent studies. I touched on the Japanese and Germans, not to suggest that we ought to emulate them because, as Ron [Cowell] pointed out, we're very different.

Our own college students [Duquesne University] are very bright and relatively sophisticated, and it is fascinating to watch their reactions when they realize that, out of every hundred people in the world, only four are Americans. The typical reaction among American students is disbelief. I mean, our culture suggests that God is American so how can we only be four out of one hundred. In business, politics, and, God forbid, military matters of the future, we're going to be facing these folks who outnumber us 96 to 4. So if we think people are important, and I think all of us believe they are the

most important ingredient to the success of our society, then the education of people is crucial. We need to be getting ourselves calibrated by being mindful of what is going on in the best classrooms around the world. Now, how we do this is a bit of a challenge. The media could certainly help, and all of us need to be better informed.

On the other end of the spectrum, we ought to say to our incumbent school administrators and teachers that we really aren't blaming you for all the ills of the system. The toughest problems are largely outside of the classroom, and you are a vital resource to solving them so please don't be as threatened as you seem to be.

I don't know what Ron [Bowes] is going to say about this, but the reaction to certain specific initiatives, seems to be that the Catholic School System is going to take over the enterprise—going to work for Rome. This is absurd. The Catholic School System is struggling to be viable and maintain its own high standards. There simply isn't the capability there. The Catholic schools are proud of their high standards and great performance, but that's different from having some kind of a monstrous game plan that involves taking over the whole enterprise. Somehow we have to motivate the discussion in a non-life-threatening or career-threatening way. We do need to include our incumbent people in the discussion, recognize them, and reward them for changing.

Virtually every other segment of our society has had to change, and radically. That's not happened yet in education. Now, what to do?

Before I came over, I talked to John Murray, who among other things, has chaired the study that's now being distributed with a fancy acronym, REAP; but I think of it [REAP] as school equity. Its main thrust is to ponder the implications of the apparent or real disparity in school funding and to try to relate that in some meaningful way. I think the most

significant finding is that there's no convincing cause-and-effect relationship.

The punchline that John [Murray] suggests we come to sounds really very simple and doable. We have to concentrate our early schooling resources on making sure that by the third grade, third graders can read at an acceptable third-grade level! If a student, any student, falls significantly behind in their ability to read at the third-grade level, they are lost in the system from then on. It's so simple and logical. It's like setting out to study a foreign language and missing the early semesters, you're done. We could clearly concentrate and focus our resources on making sure students can read—this is not going to, or should not, engender controversy.

The other suggestion is in the spirit of looking at the best systems and disseminating that information. We can do this by community or state. Entire states are starting to do this—Texas, Kansas, Virginia, California, and Michigan.

Let me interject, maybe to cause a little bit of additional Japanese distress here, I have a poster sitting in my office—the Dean's office at the Business School—frankly so all of our professors can see it. The poster is a summary of a multimillion-dollar telecommunications exhibition: Intercom. It is "a global college," and the essence of it is that any place on earth can become a classroom. Now this is not news, but what is startling to me is that here is a Japanese firm, with a Japanese flag, saying to the world: we are setting the pace.

In my judgment, it is a tragedy if they do this instead of us. We happen to have leading education abilities and software. Some of what I've been rambling about may sound...well, Murrin is off on his kick, you know, he's off his rocker as usual...but here's a multimillion dollar Japanese exhibition really laying claim to how technology is going to be used to educate. If we would just get off our duffs and do this in Allegheny County, Southwestern Pennsylvania, and across the state, we can leave these people in the

dust. We can, in a very significant way, bring the best of classroom techniques to the whole state.

**SHANE:** Helen, let me ask you, because you have been "in the trenches" at every level of schooling, what is your perspective on that?

**FAISON:** I've been thinking about some of the reasons that we seem to make such slow progress. One of them is our emphasis on local control, and the fact that each community decides for itself what it wishes to do. So, moving toward some kind of national standards or national curriculum in America is not nearly as easy as it is in other countries. It is also important to remember that these other countries moved much later to educate their total populations than the U.S. did, and they have more homogeneous populations, and in most cases they are smaller both in land area and in population.

We really need to realize that we are educating children not only for their own benefit, but for the benefit of the country. If we are going to do this, somehow we need to make certain that we have a level playing field for all children so that they do not reach third and fourth grade with deficiencies that cannot be corrected.

When we talk about what the government does for children, education is one of the areas where support is minimal. That is clearly one of our problems. We have to keep in mind that if we are going to hold people in schools accountable, then they must have the resources to work with children, particularly with the young children. This is especially important in our large urban communities where we can lose children very early. It is very hard to recapture these children later, and to fault the schools is to place the blame in the wrong place.

**MURRIN:** I have a question for Helen. I am not espousing Japan and Germany,

but one of the things they do in those countries is craftsmanship and training. Does that appeal to you and could that not be part of our solution?

**FAISON:** I think it could be, but I think we must break down some of our traditions and some expectations of parents who believe that the only "good" education is one that leads to college attendance and graduation.

**COWELL:** Let me return to the issue of high standards and particularly national standards, and make two or three comments, in part underscoring what Helen just stated.

Even as we talk about national or state-wide standards, we have to recognize that the financing of public education is very dependent on local resources. In this state, we have more than 200 school districts, out of our 501, suing the Commonwealth, arguing that our current system is unconstitutional. And I don't know whether they are constitutionally correct in their argument or not, but surely they are morally correct.

We have a system that is indefensible. We have some school districts that have the luxury of determining if they're going to put Astroturf on their football fields. We have other school districts that don't have advanced placement courses in their curriculum, that have inadequate libraries and textbooks so old that they barely report on the Vietnam War. This is a major policy question that the legislature and the Governor and—I hope the legislature and Governor, rather than the courts—will address. If we're serious about standards, we need to address this disparity because standards have to go hand in hand with access to high-quality programs.

Moreover, when we talk about national standards, or even state-wide standards, we run into the issue of local control and parochial views. The type of national standards that are embraced in Japan or Germany are feared by many

sectors of the community right here in Pennsylvania and in Pittsburgh.

For example, when the Allegheny Policy Council talked about the idea of 10th-grade certificates of mastery, there were individuals around the state who said that this was big government intruding on the rights of local school districts.

In another example, the State Board of Education was forced to withdraw a proposal that articulated a number of pretty general goals. One of the contentions had to do with the section of the proposal that involved students learning about and appreciating the business culture. People argued that this was intruding on the rights of parents—as if this was something sinister.

So, it's easy to say we should rally around the notion of vigorous standards, and I tend to agree. But we have a community that needs to be persuaded that standards are in the interest of kids and the community, and are, in fact, supportive of parents.

**TOMALIS:** I would concur on the need for high standards, and I don't think anybody's ever going to say we don't want high standards. The question is, what is the role of the state in setting those standards and making sure they are met.

Given that there are excellent teachers and administrators throughout the public education system, I think the proper role of the state is to set the bar high and to challenge. Once the standards are high, then we [the state] need to take a hands-off approach as much as possible. State regulations can tie the hands of the local administrators, principals, and teachers, rather than freeing them up to be able to pursue standards. I think we will see a lot of progress and innovative ideas if we set high goals and benchmark those goals, and then let local school districts pursue those goals free from government regulation.

**SHANE:** Do you have in mind an example of an area where you think the

current regulatory framework micro-manages when we would be better off just telling schools what the objective is and allowing them to meet it?

**TOMALIS:** Examples are found when schools want to do anything innovative, including such things as extend school hours. For example, charter schools can implement innovative approaches and extend hours. Charter schools are good examples of parents, teachers, and others working together for solutions at the local level.

**FAISON:** If I may interrupt, I don't think there is a lot of concern about standards that the state sets once they're set. I think the criticism is generally related to the procedures that must be followed in operating a school district. Questions about how many days you must do this, or how many minutes you must do that, and which forms you must complete, are examples of the regulations that hamper the operation of school districts.

**COWELL:** Actually, the State Board of Education, with the enactment of the new Chapter 5 a few years ago, gave unprecedented flexibility to school districts to do just what you described. It freed up school districts from the Carnegie Unit Regiment and allowed them to articulate what students were expected to learn and demonstrate before they got a high school diploma. Through the strategic-planning process, local school districts now determine how they're going to apply 53 learning outcomes to their own curriculum. Moreover, the curriculum is determined at the local level, along with the structure of the day and even the year. This is a significant improvement, not a panacea, but an important step forward. There is some concern that policy makers in Harrisburg, including the legislature, will choose to go backwards to the Carnegie Unit Regiment, and thus move away from the first-ever unprecedented effort to articulate at the local level what students

ought to learn before we give them a high school diploma.

**BOWES:** We do have good schools that are functioning. Some of our students are the best in the world. The question is, how can we improve all schools? What incentives are needed?

Ron [Cowell] talked about the suit among the rural schools because they don't have the same level of funding. Well, you know Kansas City had poured \$2.5 billion into their system—that was a \$40,000-per-pupil expenditure. Every child had their own computer, every learning device that you could think of; classes were reduced in size, and so forth and so on. The results were worse. 20/20 presented that on television.

The point is that if we throw money at the problem, there is often very little, if any, progress. How does that happen and why does that happen? I believe it happens because there is no drive and incentive in that system to be the absolute best that you can be. This is especially true over years—teachers who have been there for 15 or 20 years.

When I talk about success in schools, I'm not comparing schools in lower socioeconomic groupings with those in affluent areas. We want to see a child in second grade, reading at the second-grade level, make it to the third grade. Maybe they won't be on the sixth-grade level like the child out in the wealthy suburban area whose parents provide them with every type of resource possible, but we do want to see progress as well as to serve every single child. How do you do that? I say you make them compete. Competition has not been mentioned at this table. The Japanese, they are driven by competition.

**SHANE:** For the record, I have to note that there are a number of studies indicating that those expenditures did produce particularly good results in Kansas City.

And, let me pose an issue in that regard. Woody Allen once had a politically

incorrect line that “Sex without love is an empty experience; but as empty experiences go, it’s one of the best.” Some people say throwing money at a problem is an empty solution; but, as empty solutions go, won’t it be the one that produces results?

After all, how much of the ferment going on is anxiety over resources. I wonder whether a large part of what we are seeing in terms of the performance of our school systems, good, bad, or indifferent, is a reflection of the distribution of resources that people, for various reasons, are unwilling to tamper with.

**TOMALIS:** With the lawsuit that is currently before the courts, I really can’t comment too much on the financial plan except to say that this issue is not unique to Pennsylvania. I believe about half the states now have one form or another of lawsuits. If I can, I would like to return for a second to the question of what do parents do when the school their child goes to doesn’t have adequate funding. For example, what does a parent do when the school does not offer the student a particular academic curriculum, or a technical curriculum? Where is the accountability? It might have something to do with finances, but at the same time, there’s not a lot of ability for that parent to make a positive impact upon that child’s education or experience.

**SHANE:** Nobody’s used the “V” word yet, and I’m wondering whether you all want to talk about this. What is the role of vouchers as part of a system of accountability? Are vouchers a central issue or are they really a side issue?

**TOMALIS:** No, it’s a critical issue to the thinking; but, as you say, the “V” word has been demonized across the whole debate of educational reform. What it is, is you’re giving parents the ability to affect positive change in their children’s lives by putting them in an environment where they’re going to succeed. In many

ways, it is very similar to exactly what happens on the higher education level in this state where the state gives public money through PHEAA grants to parents and to kids to go to a private school, public school, or to parochial school. Institutions of higher education do use market forces to attract students to their institution. They are able to structure their curriculum—their whole development—in such a way to attract students that bring money with them. The question is why can’t we put that ability on the local level with parents, doing this with basic education?

**COWELL:** I don’t want to turn this into a voucher debate. Let me simply say that the debate about vouchers is a debate that is very intense, very emotional, and will pass. The fact is that vouchers, even if implemented, will not solve the problem of public schools and will not provide real choices for many parents and their children. This is particularly true in those communities where there are no non-public school options.

In a nutshell, vouchers have been rejected all over this country. Every time voters have been able to vote on the issue, they have rejected vouchers. There is no voucher program operating that provides public dollars to religious schools or children attending religious schools anywhere in the country. There are two programs that are on hold because they are being challenged in the courts—Milwaukee and Ohio. In this state, the legislature in 1991 and in 1995 rejected voucher proposals on the grounds that they’re unconstitutional. Vouchers violate the federal and state constitutions. They also represent an expensive new program at a time when voters are telling policy makers in Washington and in Harrisburg to cut back on government.

But the issue of options and choice, I think, is a real and legitimate one. I do think there are folks on different sides of the voucher issue that could come

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—RON COWELL

together. For instance, charter schools. There is a bill presently under consideration that, if enacted, would give parents, groups of teachers, the University of Pittsburgh, or the Carnegie Science Center, for example, an opportunity to sponsor a charter school. The charter school would have a relationship with the local school district, but could also provide other options—in a public school context.

Distance learning is another approach to creating choices, and it is one that we're going to see more and more of in the country and in Pennsylvania in particular. Policy makers, including the Governor and the legislature, are exploring issues pertaining to distance learning. In the past when we've talked about choices, we have thought about it in terms of moving kids; in fact, we will be much better at moving information around than we could ever be at moving people. In mid-January, I was visiting Schenley High School and saw kids excited about studying Spanish, as the Internet allowed them to read that day's newspapers from cities in Spain. We're going to learn more and more how to make education exciting and interesting to those kids who have had their enthusiasm stifled by education practices in the past.

**FAISON:** I would like to say that competition among schools does effect improvement in all of the schools within the district. Someone said that schools don't particularly care what happens, because they are assigned students. Schools do become anxious when they realize that other schools, even within the district, are able to attract their students and they do try to respond to that. In terms of competition, I am concerned that parents of means have opportunities to exercise choices. I think it would be great if we ever reached the point at which all parents can exercise the kind of influence that parents of means can. I think this is one area we need to be concerned about.

**BOWES:** I think that's exactly what the Governor is trying to do in terms of extending choices to the poor and disadvantaged, and this is not only for non-public schools. That's genuinely what he believes, and that's why he was attempting to bring about this type of reform. It's all about improving public education through competition, accountability, and giving parents options. We have to remember that the money was only being given to the poor and disadvantaged, not to the middle class and the wealthy. Now, whether it's enough money for parents actually to make choices, that's another thing, but it wouldn't make any difference, Dr. Faison, because if they [the legislature] gave the full-tuition amount, there would be some other argument.

At some point, voucher legislation is going to break through and a floodgate will open. Yes, it's very difficult to break the power of the status quo and monopoly, especially in a system that has made education a multibillion dollar business. I think vouchers are an essential and feared ingredient in the school reform package. Vouchers are the best medicine. It may not taste good, but it is the best medicine for improving education in the state of Pennsylvania.

**COWELL:** I would just offer a quick and slightly different view. I really believe that in Pennsylvania in 1995, the debate about vouchers got in the way of other much more meaningful education reform. As the voucher issue is set aside—even if it's just temporarily because I understand the Governor's commitment to the voucher concept—the Governor and the legislature can work together on other issues on the education agenda.

We can then see legislation passed that will provide for the establishment of charter schools. I think that we will see, be it through the statutory or regulatory process, the establishment of rigorous academic standards with appropriate assessment and accountability measures

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attached. We've already seen movement, through the special session that the Governor called on crime, on issues pertaining to safety in schools. There are a number of issues, dealing with meaningful education reform within a public school context, that can quickly move forward and be enacted into law in Pennsylvania.

**FAISON:** I would have to agree with you.

**TOMALIS:** The Governor never said that the sole answer to all the problems in public education is vouchers. That is one aspect, but there is not a silver bullet that will cure all the ills of public education. Vouchers will add competition and will give parents the ability to influence their child's education.

I want to talk about how we create systemic reform within the context of a monopoly. Some of the issues that were involved in the 1995 debate had to do with teachers' certification, charter schools, vouchers, and a variety of other things.

It's interesting to talk with some of the people who work in the school system as it currently exists. Some of these people have influenced the power interests in Harrisburg and essentially developed the current system. These people are the least likely to endorse radical systemic change. I think their influence was manifested in the debates this past year.

When you get out of Harrisburg and talk to people on the local level, it's different. I'll give you a perfect example. Very early on, the Secretary of Education sat down with teachers and experts from the Teacher Certification Bureau [to discuss changes in certification]. The front-line teachers, outside of the auspices of the union, indicated that, "we can do these changes, we can do professional development, increase the amount of professionalism, and elevate public education as a whole."

Well the union came out and said our teacher-certification issue was too strong;

yet, those certification requirements were developed by teachers on the front lines. The teachers gave us input and they helped us draft our legislation. When you go to Harrisburg and you listen to the lobbyists in Harrisburg, you hear a different thing than when you go to the front-line people. I think the 1995 debate was muddied by some of the rhetoric that was going around the table.

**COWELL:** In the final analysis, the Governor's package failed in 1995, in my opinion, because of the voucher issue. The voucher vote was ultimately determined by rural, fiscally and philosophically conservative Republican members of the House of Representatives. These members said that they were concerned about whether their local school districts were getting a fair amount of state money. They didn't want to see limited public resources diverted to an expensive new voucher program when the school districts that they represent are not adequately funded.

I think most, if not all, of the issues that were part of the Governor's package will be addressed by the legislature in 1996, and I think a significant number of them are going to find their way into law, particularly if the Governor and the legislature work together in a bipartisan way. I think we're all capable of doing that.

**TOMALIS:** I don't think, Representative Cowell, that you and I will solve today the reason why this failed in 1995. I will say, as these other issues do come forward, it's critical to watch how the legislation is developed. It's important that there is substance to the reforms so that when you read the fine print, the reform isn't just a facade that leaves us at the status quo.

**SHANE:** Outside of Harrisburg, what did you hear parents saying in terms of their worries?

**KRUSHEFSKI:** Over the last year, a tremendous amount of information has gone out from all parties on the school issue. I think there was a lot of confusion in the minds of many parents, as well as uncertainty about what to expect. Change is very difficult, and we are trying to make positive change in a system that people have depended on, in a certain fashion, for generations. I think we need to continue to get correct, clear, and focused information to parents so that they understand what the new choices are.

Just as this has been an education process for the parents, I think it's been an education process for us as well. That is, we all, whether it is on the legislative side or the administration side, need to do a better job of focusing on the main points and not letting one particular element of a total package, overshadow the other important points. As both Rons agreed, there are very, very important points that make up the total package, and we need to shed light on all of those and not just let one issue overshadow the rest.

**SHANE:** On the question of accountability of parents, Ron [Bowes], within the Catholic school system are there mechanisms that you think work toward giving parents more of a stake? Obviously, they always have the exit option, so in that sense, there's not a perfect analogy. But, on the day-to-day level, are there ways in which Catholic schools facilitate parental involvement that you think public schools would do well to emulate?

**BOWES:** Well, parental involvement is a necessary part of the equation. In many of our schools, it's mandatory. That is, if you choose this school, you will get involved in this school. That, I think, is a good thing, and once parents get involved, they like being involved. You must participate, no matter who you are, whether you're a housewife, a top attorney, or a Representative in the State House. Involvement in the school shows children that you care.

There is research that shows the positive effects of parental involvement in schools. Secretary Riley, last year, said we've got to get parents involved. But I think the key to parental involvement, like anything else in life, has a lot to do with ownership. Given that involvement and ownership are key, I disagree with those who don't think that school choice is the key element. I don't think it's the answer to everything, of course not, that's ridiculous; but it is the major element in terms of making all those other reforms successful. To vote with your feet, that is what's going to drive everybody to be the absolute best that they can be —when that child is valuable because that child is worth money.

**SHANE:** I know we're running short on time, but I would like to take up one other enormous topic, and one which we can't do justice to in five minutes. When I was growing up, the schools were, without question, the most diverse institutions of which I was a part. In part that is because I lived in a town that, relatively speaking, was economically, ethnically, and otherwise integrated. Not every neighborhood school is going to offer that diversity, but part of what my education accomplished was the experience of interacting with people with whom I may have had nothing especially in common other than our home town. How does diversity factor into this debate?

**BOWES:** It absolutely does because voluntary integration is better than forced integration. As a matter of fact, if you see the statistics at the U.S. Department of Education, the non-public schools in this country, in so many ways, are much more integrated and much more diverse than the public schools. That's because all parents seek out good schools. St. Paul's Cathedral School, right here in Oakland, has something like 72 different nationalities and countries represented. It's like the United Nations. That's because people



seek good schools whether they're black, white, rich, or poor.

**TOMALIS:** And that type of makeup, a multinational makeup within a school, will be an attraction to a lot of parents. A lot of parents will look toward that school and say we are dealing with the world economy, and that's the type of environment I want my son or my daughter educated in. In some ways, the school will be like a magnet.

**FAISON:** I think it's possible to have that type of diversity when you are talking about 10 percent of school children. There are many non-public schools that are not very diverse so what you are saying may be true if you look at the total, but that's not true if you look at many of them individually. And I also think that many of the students are from the same socioeconomic background even if there is another kind of diversity there. A real concern then is what will be done to provide diversity and to avoid further segregation of children.

**TOMALIS:** And a choice would further segregate...

**FAISON:** It would further segregate them.

**TOMALIS:** Well, I would argue just the opposite. I would argue that choice allows some of those people who are currently in segregated environments and segregated neighborhoods to go out of those neighborhoods and into a different neighborhood.

**BOWES:** But Helen [Faison], it's not just the non-public schools that are segregated.

**FAISON:** No, I understand that can happen in the public schools...

**BOWES:** Oh, it has...

**FAISON:** ...unless an effort is made to prevent its happening.

**COWELL:** There is information available, in survey form, that indicates that a priority of parents is to be able to send their child to a quality school in their neighborhood—and for most people that means a public school. By use of the term choice, you mean that we should give parents more authority to choose which public school their children may attend. I think you'd find support for that; and, in some places, there are initiatives underway that seek to accommodate that. But parents don't really want to send their kids 30 miles down the road to another school. They want the school in their neighborhood to improve.

Vouchers, I don't think, as a practical matter, are going to be able to create very many real options for very many additional parents. In 1991, the House Education Committee had extensive public hearings on the issue of vouchers. The Bishop of the Scranton Archdiocese testified about the popularity of parochial schools in that diocese, and pointed out that in some parishes you have to put your child's name on the waiting list for the school when the child is born. As a practical matter, that's not going to create an option for somebody who today wants to send their child to that school. It also doesn't help those parents, in many cases, where enrollment decisions or tuition decisions are predicated on whether you belong to a particular faith or whether you belong to the parish, or whether you have contributed "X" number of dollars in the Sunday collection.

The voucher issue is one, as I said earlier, that some folks feel very strongly about. It has been debated in this state on a couple of occasions very intensely. It has been defeated. Somebody may choose to raise it again, but it is not, even if it were to pass, the answer to the fundamental issues that we're talking about today. Those are, how do you create quality academic program options and challenging standards for all kids?

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**SHANE:** As deans stick together, so I'm giving another dean the last word. Tom?

**MURRIN:** We obviously were unrehearsed, more obviously have different views; so, on behalf of all of us, let me commend the way you brought us together.

I'm struck, frankly, by what I sense is a very significant emerging consensus out of all of this. There is no question about the importance of education and the vital role that people play. We recognize the different views we have. My only hope is that we give it our increasing attention and involvement in the coming months because the "clock is running." Other states and other countries are progressing. We do have the basic resources in the Commonwealth to compete and to protect our world-class livability, but we've got to get about it; with a sense of urgency.

**SHANE:** One of the things that I find more and more intriguing is how a lot of traditional ideological labels seem to be breaking down in the educational debate. That is, I believe I hear a generally conservative business community talking about the importance of diversity, and I thought the other night I heard a liberal President of the United States call for school uniforms. Then, you hear the so-called conservative Governor arguing for more choice and for set-aside funds for poor kids. Maybe, if there is hope here, it is that people are beginning to focus on the issues in such a way that they're willing to break whatever ideological box they have some vested interest in and say, "Let's address these problems as if they're real problems and leave the labels behind." That would be a good thing.



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