JeSe to the N:EWS

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EVANSTON SCHOOL IDEA

The American consumer has benefited greatly from our competitive economic system which constantly induces business rivals to produce better products at cheaper prices. The competition among calculator manufacturers has surely given us better and cheaper calculators than if some Federal bureaucrat were dictating their design and pro duction.

In the public school system, however, competition is conspicu ous by its absense. The pupil is simply assigned to whatever school the bureaucracy chooses, for reasons either of geography or racial balance. The school consumer, that is the parent or the pupil, is not permitted to select the public school that offers the best ser vices or graduates students who achieve high scores in national tests.

The result is that, if your child lucks into a school with a policy of replacing the basic skills of reading, writing and arith metic with experimental nonsense, your only alternative is to abandon your child's right to a public school education and put him into a private school. You cannot choose a different public school where the policies, practices, and textbooks may be more in accord with your own values.

The elimination of this magic ingredient of competition is a major factor in the reduction in the quality of the service and the product of the world's most expensive school system. The fegimenta-

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tion in our public school system is comparable to having a bureaucrat in charge of automobile sales who would assign new car purchasers to specific dealers, instead of letting the consumer freely choose a dealer who gives the best value for the price.

In the last several years, Pasadena, California, has offered a limited choice by allowing parents to request admission for their children to one public school that is operated along traditional lines to teach the basics, or to another frankly-experimental school to accommodate parents who want their children to be in that environment. Entrance to these particular schools is by voluntary application, and there are waiting lists for both.

Now a similar attempt will be made in Evanston, Illinois. The superintendent has proposed a reorganization whereby each school in the district would be designated as one of four types, and pupils would be able to attend the school of their parents' choice. In the "graded" schools, most instruction would be given by one teacher in one classroom, with some moving about for certain classes.

In the "ungraded" schools, pupils would be grouped by skills rather than by age level, and a team of four or five teachers would handle pupils over a three-year instead of a one-year period. A six year-old who does well in math, for example, may be placed in the same instructional group with an eight-year-old moving slowly.

In the "experimental" schools, teachers would test out avant garde ideas on children whose parents are willing for them to serve as guinea pigs. And in the "traditional" schools, pupils would be required to complete a series basic textbooks in each subject each year.

Evanston will be debating the pros and cons of this proposal for the next several weeks, with a vote of the school board expected in January. To any extent what competition and choice are restored to the public schools, the children will surely benefit.

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