PS1 for 9/11/86#WHY NOT LET US CHOOSE OUR PUBLIC SCHOOL? #America has determined that the taxpayers will pay for Medicare and Medicaid, but recipients are not required to get these benefits from a ""government'' hospital or a ""government'' physician. The individual can freely choose his own hospital and doctor, and can shop around for the best.#America has determined that the taxpayers will pay for food stamps for the needy, but recipients are not required to get the benefits at a ""government'' grocery store or to take ""government-selected or approved'' food items. The individual can choose his food stores and foods, and can shop around for the best prices and produce.#A mighty uproar would surely greet any proposal that the recipients' benefit dollars be spent only on government-specified hospitals, doctors, stores, or foods. Americans are so accustomed to the high quality that we enjoy in medical services and food products that we take the environment of competition for granted.#Why, then, do we tolerate the prohibition of competition and choice in government-paid education services? Recipients of taxpayer-paid schooling are forced to get their benefits from a specified government school.#The National Governors' Association, at its recent meeting held in Hilton Head, South Carolina, asked that fundamental question. The question is so simple and so obvious that it's as sensational as the child asking why the emperor doesn't have any clothes on.#The Governors asked, ""Why not let parents choose the schools their children attend? ... Parents should have more choice in the (BF)public(end BF) schools they attend.''#Of course, parents do have the choice to transfer their children to another public private schools IF they pay the tuition AFTER they've paid taxes for the public schools they are not using. That's equivalent to saying, ""You can use Medicare benefits ONLY if you use the government-selected hospitals and doctors; if you choose your own hospital and doctor, you must pay for them with your own money.''#The Governors don't think that's good enough for education. Colorado Governor Richard D. Lamm pointed out that, ""In virtually every area of our economic and private lives we have a smorgasbord of choice.

We can choose among 100 breakfast cereals, 200 makes of automobiles, 300 different church denominations.''#""Thus it is ironic,'' he continued, ""that in this land of choice there is so little choice in the public school system.'' The system controls both production and consumption. The system tells our children where they will learn, what they will learn, and at what speed and quality.#No matter how inferior or shoddy the product the school produces, or how dangerous the school environment from drugs or assault, children are not permitted to transfer to a different school. They are forced to endure the particular school that is mandated either by residence or by arbitrariness of court order.#The Governors recommend that we ""unlock the values of competition in the educational marketplace.'' Schools then can compete for students, teachers, and dollars, and this will force changes that produce better products. Lamm predicts that we can ""increase excellence by increasing the choices.''#Suppose all those who live in the eastern one-third of America were mandated to buy a General Motors car, those who live in the central third a Ford car, and those in the western third a Chrysler car. The results would be predictable. When production and consumption have no relation to quality or price, prices would go up and quality would go down.#It was interesting to watch Mary Futrell, president of the National Education Association, trying to rebut Governor Lamm in a television debate. She was visibly frightened at the prospect of competition. Her only argument was that the Governors' recommendation might discriminate against minorities. That's ridiculous; certainly minority parents would be given the same freedom to choose as majority parents.#Futrell's counterproposal was to urge more ""parental involvement.'' For her, that's really a switch! Futrell has been bitterly fighting parental involvement at every turn, particularly the Pupil Protection Amendment which gives parents a say-so over psychological curricula in the classroom.#The Governors' report pointed out that ""Our model of compulsory, packaged education, as it now exists, is an enemy of parental involvement and responsibility simply because it allows no choice,'' and

anyway educators are ""uncomfortable with parents serving as members of decision making or advisory groups.''#The parental involvement most parents would like most of all is being able to choose which school their children attend.