

School Choice and the Achievement Gap

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Abstract

The possibility is examined that school choice programs could be a means to reducing the achievement gap. Data based on meta-analytic research and the examination of nationwide data sets suggest that school choice programs that include private schools could reduce the achievement gap by 25%. The propounding of this possibility is based on research indicating that the achievement gap in faith-based schools is generally 25% narrower than one finds in public schools. Results of these studies suggest that both the racial achievement gap and the socioeconomic achievement gap are reduced by the same degree (25%). The significance of these results is discussed, especially as it pertains to the attitudes that people frequently have toward school choice.

Keywords

choice, educational policy, school choice, students, urban education

After five decades of trying to reduce the achievement gap, and to everyone's chagrin encountering repeated failure, researchers are beginning to ask a question. That is, could it be that this nation's failure to bridge the achievement could rest in its insular insistence on limiting the number of options used to bring about progress (Jeynes, 1999, 2002, 2003b, 2010a)? Could it be that educators typically limit the range of options to something less than the full gamut because they consider options available only in the public sector? To the degree that this might be so, social scientists should at least examine

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the possibility that a school choice rubric that includes private schools could provide at least some of the solutions (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993; Keith & Page, 1985; Lee, 1986).

A Barrier to an Open Mind to School Choice: The Tension Between the Public and Private Sector

One might ask why it is that only a small segment of the U.S. population has considered school choice, including private schools, as a vehicle for reducing the achievement gap? Much of the reason rests in the increasing tension that exists in this country between those in the private and public sectors and the steady growth in the power of the public sector relative to the private sector (Kurtz, 2010; Skarica, 2011). In order to open minds to the possibility that school choice programs could help alleviate the racial and socioeconomic achievement gaps, it is advisable to understand: (a) the present ramifications of this tension, (b) how these tensions arose, and (c) how the growing relative power of the public sector is influencing the debate (Jeynes, 2008b; Kurtz, 2010; Skarica, 2011).

Few would doubt the notion that over the past few decades, in particular, a rising tension has emerged between the public and private sectors (Jeynes, 2000; Bracey, 1997, 2002; Hudolin, 1994; Lieberman, 1993; Ravitch, 2010). Sadly, one could argue that those in the public sector are most concerned about what is good for them, and those in the private sector are also most cognizant about what is best for those functioning in that sector. This near-sightedness has manifested itself along a number of dimensions: educational, political, and in the economics of alleviating budget deficits (Jeynes, 2000; Hagel, 2008; Harwood & Seib, 2008; Hudolin, 1994; Lieberman, 1993). Unfortunately, it is very rare to find a public school educator concerned about the health of religious schools. In fact, a plethora of teachers are antagonistic toward Christian schools, for example (Dexter, 1995; Olasky, 1988). Similarly, there is an increased political tension between those in public sector jobs and those in the private sector (Berliner & Biddle, 1995; Lieberman, 1993; Ravitch, 2003; Weir, 2007).

From 1900 until the early 1960s, Americans understood that those who served in the private sector made more income for similar work than in the public sector (Hudolin, 1994; Morgan & Morgan, 2010; Nagel, 2002; Peterson, 2006). In the minds of most, this reality was readily accepted, especially because the United States was a thriving capitalist country (Nagel,

2002; Peterson, 2006). However, although civilians in the private sector earned more money, it was also understood that those in the public sector enjoyed more security (Nagel, 2002; Peterson, 2006). Government workers, for example, were more likely to have a job for life (Nagel, 2002; Peterson, 2006). Over the last 45 years, however, the federal government has been increasing in power relative to the private sector (Morgan & Morgan, 2010; Nagel, 2002; Peterson, 2006). Presently, government workers not only have more secure positions of employment than their private sector counterparts but also usually make more money now (Morgan & Morgan, 2010; Nagel, 2002; Peterson, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 2010). The U.S. government sector has become dominant and now makes up about 44% of American gross domestic product (GDP; Kurtz, 2010; Skarica, 2011). This is particularly amazing because this percentage exceeds that found in Great Britain and Germany, which are typically regarded as *demosocialist states* (Kurtz, 2010; Skarica, 2011).

The growing hegemony of the U.S. government is no more apparent than in the American elementary and secondary school system. In the American school system, three realities are ostensible: (a) public schoolteachers have a job security that well exceeds that experienced by private school teachers, and they also make far higher salaries (Gross, 1999; Wallace & Graves, 1995). In 2008-2009, the average public school teachers made US\$54, 319 per year, whereas the average private school teacher earned about 70% of that figure (National Education Association, 2010; U. S. Department of Education, 2011). Second, the public school sector has a near monopoly of the enrollment of elementary and secondary school pupils (Peterson, 2006). Approximately 90% of American youth attend public schools (Bracey, 2002; Chubb & Moe, 1990; Peterson, 2006). Third, the fact that public school taxation of constituents has risen substantially over the last half century has put private schools at such a disadvantage that many of them have been forced to close and others face the dire prospect of closure (Jeynes, 2007a; Chubb & Moe, 1990; Peterson, 2006).

The public sector's growing strength generally and the dominance of the public schools specifically have yielded two realities. First, those in the public schools tend to limit solutions to educational challenges to the public sector. They almost entirely overlook private religious schools as potential partners in crafting solutions to problems such as the achievement gap. Second, the increasing relative power of the public schools through taxation is producing a financial chokehold on myriad religious private schools (White House, 2008). Ironically, with this eventuation American society may be truncating one of its best hopes to reducing the achievement gap.

As one would only expect, the private schools under the most severe pressure are usually religious schools operating in some of the poorest sections of the country, for example, the inner city and in rural areas (Anitt, 2003; Peterson, 2006; Steinfels, 2003). According to White House estimates, during the 2000-2006 period, 1,162 inner city faith-based schools were closed and nearly 425,000 students lost, mostly due to insufficient funding (White House, 2008). By definition, these schools were not founded with the goal of making a profit (Hoffer, 1998; Peterson, 2006). This is axiomatic not only because churches and other religious organizations are non-profitable but also because efforts to school in these areas are viewed as a divine and altruistic attempt to help those who are less fortunate (Jeynes, 2002, 2003b, 2006; Hoffer, 1998; Peterson, 2006).

The White House Summit and the Reduction of the Achievement GAP in Faith-Based Schools

The problem of the closure of faith-based schools in the inner city and other urban areas has been ostensible enough so that when he was president, George W. Bush called for a White House summit to address this problem (Jeynes, 2008a; White House, 2008). In this summit, President Bush and the nation's leading researchers and political and economic thinkers all converged to speak on the need for faith-based schools in the inner city (Jeynes, 2008a, White House, 2008). Many remarkable findings emerged out of the White House summit that significantly enlighten the dialogue today regarding the place that faith-based schools have in the education of children of color. Probably the most publicized result of the White House summit surrounded evidence indicating that faith-based schools reduce the achievement gap by approximately 25%, or more even when one adjusts for socioeconomic status (Jeynes, 2008a). And indeed, via the examination of nationwide data sets and meta-analysis, it is now apparent that African American and Latino children in private religious schools perform higher academically than their counterparts in public schools (Jeynes, 1999, 2002, 2003b, 2010a; Bryk et al., 1993; Hoffer, 1998). Moreover, the achievement gap between African American students and Latinos on the one hand and White students on the other does tend to be on average about 25% narrower in faith-based schools than it is in public schools (Jeynes, 1999, 2002, 2003b). What this means is that the advantage going to faith-based schools is greater for African American and Latino students than it is for White students, (Jeynes, 1999, 2002, 2003b).

The results of nationwide data sets and meta-analyses also indicate that the socioeconomic achievement gap is about 25% narrower at faith-based schools than it is in public schools (Jeynes, 1999, 2003b, 2010a). In fact, the data indicate that religious private schools benefit the lowest socioeconomic status (SES) quartile of students the most, the second lowest quartile of these youth the second most, and the highest quartile of students the least (Jeynes, 2002, 2003b, 2008a).

There is little question that the set of results for both the racial and socioeconomic achievement gap appear to be the ideal for the alleviating this social challenge (Jeynes, 1999, 2002, 2003b). That is, it appears that one of the most accessible means of narrowing the achievement gap will not require billions of dollars of additional government funding, but rather simply facilitating schools of faith to do what they already do quite well. Nevertheless, one should point out that it would be unwise to assume that these results apply to all the most prominent expression of schools of faith. Nearly all the schools of faith in the United States are Christian (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Therefore, nearly all the schools available in the data set were Christian (Jeynes, 1999, 2002, 2003b).

The meta-analytic research on the achievement gap indicates that the extent to which religious schools bridge the various educational gap is quite consistent across the type of gap and the scholastic measure (Jeynes, 1999, 2002, 2003b). For example, schools of faith reduce the socioeconomic educational gap by approximately the same degree that they reduce the gap that exists by race (Jeynes, 1999, 2002, 2003b). In addition, degree of gap reduction is very similar in size across academic subject (Jeynes, 1999, 2002, 2003b, 2010a). All of the reductions are statistically significant. Numerically speaking, there was a slight tendency for the reduction in the achievement gap to be smaller for science, and somewhat under 25%, but this difference in reduction was not statistically significantly less than for the other academic measures (Jeynes, 1999, 2002, 2003b). There was also a slight tendency for the narrowing of the achievement gap to be greater for nonstandardized measures such as grade retention and grade point average than they were for standardized tests scores, but once again this difference was not statistically significant (Jeynes, 1999, 2002, 2003b).

The results indicate then that attending faith-based schools narrows the achievement gap across every academic subject and measure (Jeynes, 1999, 2002, 2003b). This fact adds credence to the idea that the influence of faith-based school on the achievement gap is both broad and significant (Dunham & Wilson, 2007; Portfeli, Wang, Audette, McColl, & Alogozzine, 2009;

Rippeyoung, 2009; Slavin & Madden, 2006; Stevens, Olivarez, & Hamman, 2006).

The Influence of Religious Schools When Coupled With Faith and Family

Equally noteworthy as the fact that the achievement gap for African American and Latino students narrows when they attend schools of faith, is the fact that the other related factors appear to also reduce the gap (Jeynes, 1999, 2002, 2003b; Dunham & Wilson, 2007; Portfeli, Wang, Audette, McColl, & Alogozzine, 2009). It appears that those who are religious do better schooling than their counterparts who are not (Jeynes, 1999, 2002, 2003b; Bryk et al., 1993; Hoffer, 1998; Keith & Page, 1985). This result holds quite consistently whether religiosity is defined as including both internal (i.e., a person defines oneself as being highly religious) and external (i.e., a student regularly attends a church or other house of worship) or just one of the other component.

Another related factor appears strongly related to a reduction on the gap and that is originating from a traditional two biological parent family structure (Jeynes, 2011; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989). For some time, it has been known that children of all ages generally perform better in school if they come from intact families than if they do not (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989). Two of the primary reasons for this phenomena are the parents from intact homes generally more involved in their children's education than parents in one-parents in one-parents homes (Jeynes, 2003a, 2005, 2007b, 2010b). Another reason is that family disruption and instability is often emotionally upsetting and psychologically destabilizing for children (Wallerstein & Lewis, 1998). There is a substantial amount of evidence to suggest that these two primary reasons hold for children of color as well (Jeynes, 2003a, 2005, 2007b; Wallerstein & Lewis, 1998). To whatever extent religious married couples build their lives and philosophies on "family values," the advantages of living in a two biological parent family are noteworthy.

The findings regarding religiosity are also interesting because a higher percentage of African Americans and Latinos describe themselves as highly religious than one finds in the general population (Irvine & Foster, 1996). African Americans, in particular, have a propensity to define themselves as highly religious. It is difficult to know what factors contribute to this fact. Part of the reasons likely rests in historical factors (Woodson, 1915). For example, the fact that Martin Luther King was devout Baptist minister who

credits Jesus Christ with enabling him to persevere, clearly aids in African Americans espousing the potency of Christianity (Irvine & Foster, 1996; King, 1998).

The results of the analysis of nationwide data sets and meta-analyses regarding faith and family go well beyond the boundaries of the impact of faith and family factors individually (Jeynes, 1999, 2003a, 2003b, 2005, 2007b). What has been found is that, on average, if a youth is religious and comes from a two parent biological family the achievement gap totally disappears. In fact, for the two of the five standardized measures the achievement gap was exactly 0.0%. The math and reading gaps were also essentially zero and therefore was no where near being statistically significant. Specifically, for math, the gap was 0.4% favoring African American and Latino students, and for Reading, the gap was 0.4% favoring White students. In fact, if one controls for SES there is overall a slight advantage in favor of African American and Latino students (Jeynes, 1999, 2002, 2003b). Without controlling for SES, the achievement gap disappears with no statistically significant differences, except a small difference for science, which is not statistically significant.

These findings are quite noteworthy especially when one considers that educators in North America have been trying to reduce the achievement gap for roughly three and half centuries, and social scientists have made it a priority for 50 years (Haycock, 2001; Jeynes, 2007a; Roach, 2001). Of course, some argue that the reality is that many youth of color do not grow up in intact two-parents family. This is clearly true, but even among children of color raised in single-parent families when those adolescents and younger are people of faith, the achievement gap is cut in half (Jeynes, 1999, 2003b, 2008b). To the extent that faith-based schools are more likely to promote faith and family, this could produce a religious school impact that is even greater than previously imagined.

What Does This Mean for School Choice?

Whatever, one's background, for the good of the country, one should be concerned about the success of all schools in the United States. If one finds that he or she is concerned only with the public sector or only with the private sector, this contributes to national divisiveness and gridlock (Hagel, 2008; Harwood & Seib, 2008; Peterson, 2006). When this is the case, people are no longer merely part of the solution, they are instead part of the problem. It is, of course, only normal that various people should prefer either public or private schools, but to simply not care whether one or the other sector does

well or not is to wish ill on America's children and this is a problem indeed. To the extent that it is evident that schools of faith help reduce the achievement gap, if one really cares about children of color more than one's petty biases, he or she should want to encourage the presence of faith-based schools on the educational landscape.

Unfortunately, the presence of Catholic, Evangelical, and other schools in the inner city is quickly fading (Anitt, 2003; Peterson, 2006; Steinfels, 2003; Wells, 2002). Most of this development is a product of financial realities (Anitt, 2003; Peterson, 2006; Steinfels, 2003; Wells, 2002). As the number of tax dollars and bond issues to support public schools has increased, faith-based schools have increasingly found themselves at a competitive disadvantage (Cookson, 1994; Peterson, 2006; Wells, 2002).

To understand this historical process, one should examine the trends of the past 200, 100, and especially the last 50 years. Before 1840, the overwhelming majority of elementary and secondary schools were private (Gatto, 2001; Messerli, 1972). Horace Mann emerged as the father of the common schools in 1837, although his school rubric was not fully embraced until after the Civil War (Jeynes, 2007a; Gatto, 2001; Messerli, 1972). Even by 1874, about two thirds of the students attending high school attended privately run ones, nearly all of which were Christian schools (King, 1964). All of that changed dramatically when the state supreme court of Michigan ruled in a case best known simply as the Kalamazoo case that states had the right to tax people to support public high schools even if the family never sent anyone to the public schools (King, 1964). This decision forever changed the balance of power between public and private schools. Within 20 years of this decision, instead of being outnumbered 2 to 1 in enrollment public surged to a 70% to 30% advantage (King, 1964).

In many respects, the Kalamazoo decision of 1874 had precisely the opposite effect on secondary schooling that *Dartmouth v. Woodward* (1819) had on college and graduate training (Fribourg, 1965; Horowitz, 1987; King, 1964). The *Dartmouth v. Woodward* case emerged after three major Ivy League colleges were taken over by their state governments in three states. New Hampshire took over Dartmouth, New York took over what is now called Columbia, and Pennsylvania did the same to Penn (Fribourg, 1965; Horowitz, 1987). Because these states concluded they could not inaugurate a college that could possibly compete against these Ivy League institutions, they decided that the only action they could take to assert their control, was to take over each of these institutions (Fribourg, 1965; Horowitz, 1987).

As one might imagine the colleges that were the objects of these takeovers were not particularly pleased. They were aghast that these state governments

could confiscate all their property buildings, and supplies when all of these were privately funded, built, and supplied (Fribourg, 1965; Horowitz, 1987). Was the government's action not an act of socialism or worse? Dartmouth, naturally won the case and each of the state governments returned the property, buildings, and supplies that they had confiscated earlier. However, the message of the Dartmouth case was clear: Private universities have the right to exist.

The vast majority of educational historians regard *Dartmouth v. Woodward* as the most important Supreme Court case of the 1800s that involves education (Fribourg, 1965; Horowitz, 1987; Johnson, 1997). The reason why historians view the case so highly is because it forced state and private universities to compete against one another, rather than have the states take over the private college (Fribourg, 1965; Horowitz, 1987; Johnson, 1997). What resulted from this decision was good old-fashioned competition. As a decision, a healthy private sector was allowed to continue to flourish and a solid public sector in college education was encouraged to develop as well. With this competition in place, what began to emerge was the greatest system of colleges and universities in the world (Fribourg, 1965; Horowitz, 1987; Johnson, 1997).

If one examines the ratings of the universities by England, China, Germany, and U.S. News & World Report each year, the conclusion is clear. American universities dominate the list of the world's top 25 (Jeynes, 2007a; U.S. News & World Report, 2011). Admittedly, if one examines the list of top American universities ranked by U.S. News & World Report, each year private universities dominate the top 20. The Ivy League universities of course are there. Harvard and Princeton usually top the list, with Yale not too far behind (U.S. News & World Report, 2011). In the east, besides the Ivy League, one has MIT, in the South, Duke and Vanderbilt, in the Mid-west the University of Chicago and Northwestern, and in the West Stanford and Cal. Tech (C.I.T.; U.S. News & World Report, 2011). But even though these top private universities do still dominate, once one reaches the rank of 20, between 20 and 40 the best of the state universities begin to appear: UC-Berkeley, University of Michigan, University of North Carolina, University of Virginia, University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), University of Wisconsin, and so on (U.S. News & World Report, 2011).

In addition, the Dartmouth case allowed certain key rivalries to develop between public and private universities that nearly all historians agree have made each of the rival schools better (Jeynes, 2008b; Fribourg, 1965; Horowitz, 1987; Johnson, 1997). Some of these rivalries include University of Southern California versus UCLA, Notre Dame versus the University of Michigan, Stanford, versus UC-Berkeley, Duke versus the University of

North Carolina, and so forth (Fribourg, 1965; Horowitz, 1987; Johnson, 1997). The competition of the state versus private sector have caused public universities to lower class sized to better compete, private universities to expand course offerings, private universities to offer more scholarships, and state universities to upgrade their facilities (Jeynes, 2007a; Fribourg, 1965; Horowitz, 1987; Johnson, 1997).

With all the advantages that accrued from the Dartmouth case due to increased competition, it is unfortunate that the Kalamazoo case yielded the reverse effects. It in essence handed over to the public schools such a prodigious economic advantage that the public sphere enjoys a near monopoly on elementary and secondary school education (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Peterson, 2006).

That is not to state that the Kalamazoo case was totally wrong. One can certainly state objectively and fairly that all citizens should give something because everyone benefits by their existence (King, 1964; Peterson, 2006). That is, their presence raises the education level of doctors, car mechanics, and so forth, which everyone uses as a part of the life. Almost no one argues that some should pay nothing to support public schools. The question arises, however, whether it is really fair for families that never use the public schools to pay the same level of support as family that heavily use those schools. Most fair-minded people would say, "no."

The answer that one gives to this last question appears all the more important because since the 1950s the various levels of government in the United States have pumped an unprecedented amount of tax and bond money into public education (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Peterson, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 2010). The amount spent per pupil on public elementary and secondary school education during this time has soared and rose roughly 120% in real terms (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). These increased expenditures clearly do reveal a commitment to education on the part of various levels of the U.S. government (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). However, these actions have had what some would call an unintended consequence, although others would say it is an intended consequence. That is, local, state, and federal taxes combined have surged so high that because of this (a) increased tax burden and (b) the prodigious financial advantages that public schools have built up, many educators are wondering out loud whether faith-based schools can really survive (Anitt, 2003; Steinfels, 2003).

One can argue the tax burden that Americans bear to support public schools and the benefits that these schools have procured over the years are so enormous, that has had the effect of running myriad faith-based schools out of business and out of the public square (Anitt, 2003; Chubb & Moe, 1990; Peterson, 2006; Steinfels, 2003). In addition, there is no end in sight.

Sadly, but predictably, the first faith-based schools to close their doors have been in some of the poorest and most needy areas in the country (Anitt, 2003; Chubb & Moe, 1990; Peterson, 2006; Steinfels, 2003).

These developments are more unfortunate still when one considers that some of the greatest increase in government elementary and secondary school spending occurred between 1963 and 1980 (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Yet during that same period, average SAT scores plummeted 17 consecutive years (Jeynes, 2008b; U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Somehow, one wonders whether the money was spent the right way. The contrast could not be clearer between a healthy college and university system in which competition levels are at all-time highs and an elementary and secondary school education system in which competition is at an all-time low (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Peterson, 2006; U.S. News & World Report, 2011).

One can argue that at least at the elementary and secondary school level, American educator have become too focused on the distinction between the public and private sector, instead of viewing schooling more holistically as really a single organism (Jeynes, 2012). Increasingly, some educators are wondering whether this nation's policies have, in essence, either allowed or caused faith-based schooling to begin to die in some of the most needed areas of the country (Anitt, 2003; Jeynes, 2012; Chubb & Moe, 1990; Peterson, 2006; Steinfels, 2003). But, as one witnesses the nation's achievement gaps remaining ominously high, and perhaps even beginning to increase again, and the nation's public school students struggling more than they did decades ago, the data may cause one to reassess the situation. Could it be that this nation's lack of encouragement for faith-based education is contributing to the failure of some of America's most needy children? Could it be that the health of the public school system is at least to some degree dependent on the health of faith-based schools? The possibility that the answers to these questions is "yes" leads one to consider the potential that a well-thought out school choice program would have to offer.

The Potential of School Choice

Individual people may generally favor the private sector or the public sector when it comes to their preferences in schools, politics, employment, and so forth. When it comes to America's disadvantaged children and helping them overcome the achievement gap, what this article is interested in is data and evidence. The evidence is strong that youth in faith-based schools make greater progress toward reducing the achievement gap than their counterparts in public schools (Bryk et al., 1993; Keith & Page, 1985; Lee, 1986). If these

youth are religious and from two biological parent families, the gap may even evaporate (Jeynes, 1999, 2002, 2003b). With this in mind, it would seem unwise to argue that access to faith-based education should decrease. Beyond this, it is hard to argue that education offered to children of color and low SES students should decrease. This conclusion includes the presence of faith-based schools in training many of these children. Education, in these most needy areas should be on the increase rather than be in a free fall (Jeynes, 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003b). The data encourage the research and school community to care about the children affected by the school private school closings.

Suggested Developments Based on the Research

Given the relationship that exists between private religious schools and a reduction in the achievement gap, it would seem logical and reasonable for the following developments to occur:

First, educators ought to care for children beyond their schooling sphere. That is, public educators should both welcome and hope for the success of faith-based schools. They should not view Christian and other religious school teachers as competitors and certainly not adversaries.

Rather, they should view those in the faith-based realm as colleagues and “comrades” who love children and are seeking to improve their lives (Jeynes, 2012). Concurrently, faith-based educators should possess the same attitudes toward public school instructors.

One can argue that it is particularly important for public educators to have a constructive attitude toward private religious school educators because the size of the state elementary and secondary school sector dwarfs the size of the private religious school sector by nearly ten to one (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Those in the government and public sector have the power to debilitate and nearly eliminate faith-based schools. The reverse is not so. Therefore, it is especially vital that those in the public sector have some sense of appreciation for those in faith-based schools.

In addition, the trend over the last 150 years has been for the state sector to increase substantially in size and power and for the private sector to recede in power (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). For example, in 1874 high school students attending private schools actually outnumbered high school students attending public schools by approximately two to one (King, 1964). However, the advent and increased incidence of taxation in the last 1800s and until and including the present time have played a major role in causing the

prodigious shift in the enrollment distribution among public and private schools (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Peterson, 2006). The reality is that if a large number of public school educators continue to disparage the contributions of faith-based schools, there is an increased risk that faith-based schools will continue to decline in number (Berliner & Biddle, 1995). This issue is of particular concern, because religious schools are decreasing in number at the highest rate in the areas where they are likely needed the most (White House, 2008).

Second, the government and public school educators should value faith-based schools for their unique contribution to American education rather than demonstrate intolerance toward these schools, by disparaging their efforts. The government and others in the public sector ought to appreciate the fact that faith-based schools have a unique role to play in the American education system. There are certain specific roles played by religious schools that enhance the instructional landscape. There is plentiful evidence that children of color, in particular, benefit from attending faith-based schools even more than White students attending them (Jeynes, 1999, 2002, 2003b). Consequently, not surprisingly, the achievement gap tends to be narrower at religious schools than it is at public schools. This fact should not arouse jealousy on the part of public school educators, but rather should foster appreciation for these schools and some degree of satisfaction that the scholastic achievements of children of color is being maximized. When a set of schools successfully reduces the achievement gap this should be the cause of celebration, whether those schools are private or public. Yet the reality is that most leaders and educators in American are not celebrating these achievements. Instead, these accomplishments are causing public schools to become jealous and quickly flee to a defensive posture of trying to defend why it is they are unable to produce commensurate results. This state of affairs, however, is truly unfortunate because if children are doing better in school than they would do otherwise, this is a cause for great joy.

If society at large viewed American education as a single entity designed to help children, it would support the sending of more children of color to private schools as a means of reducing the achievement gap. If they were to maintain such a perspective, public school leaders would no longer view faith-based schools as adroit competitors, but as partners engaged in the same goal of schooling children (Jeynes, 2012). To whatever extent Christian schools usually do a better job than public schools of encouraging children of color to reach their full potential, American society should embrace these schools for their strengths and seek to use these advantages to help Americans accomplish more in education, not less (Peterson, 2006). If a certain educational sector

provides succor to youth who see to attain at higher levels of scholastic performance, then this fact should be appreciated, honored and used.

Third, public schools can learn from the practices of the private religious institutions, especially with regard to reducing the achievement gap. If certain sectors of society are fulfilling their goals well, why not present these schools, be they public or private, as examples that by emulating them can strengthen all demonstrations of education rather than one? It is sensible to think that schools would benefit if they could personally learn from the best schools and educators in the world, rather than merely a small slice of public schools. Clearly, just as there are practices in which private schools can learn from public schools, such as in special education, public school teachers can learn a great deal from faith-based instructors, as well. American education will benefit and grow in potency when people realize that faith-based teachers understand certain principles that can potentially benefit schools all across the country. Granted, not every single successful practice that faith-based teachers undertake can be duplicated in the public sphere, but it is also not true that every single ameliorative practice by private school teachers is irrelevant to public school education. There is a copious degree of benefit that faith-based schools can bring to American public schools at large.

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