



**Fordham**  
**Prizes**  
for  
**Excellence**  
in  
**Education**

2004



**DISTINGUISHED SCHOLARSHIP:**

**Eric A. Hanushek**, *sage of school finance*

**VALOR:**

**Howard L. Fuller**, *crusader for social justice*



## PRIZE FOR VALOR

**Howard L. Fuller**

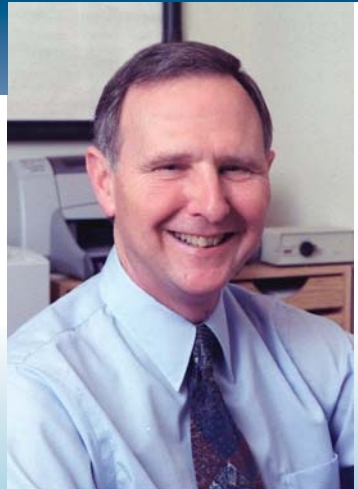
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## PRIZE FOR DISTINGUISHED SCHOLARSHIP

**Eric A. Hanushek**

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# Thomas B. Fordham Foundation Prizes for Excellence in Education 2004

The Thomas B. Fordham Foundation is pleased to award the second annual Fordham Prizes for Excellence in Education. These prizes, each of which bears a cash award of \$25,000, recognize and reward distinguished scholars, practitioners, and policymakers who succeed in advancing the cause of education reform in accordance with the Foundation's core principles:

- dramatically higher standards;
- verifiable outcomes and accountability;
- equality of opportunity;
- a solid core curriculum taught by knowledgeable instructors;
- competition, choice, and educational diversity; and
- an education system that responds to the needs of its users.

The Foundation awards two prizes, the winners of which are selected by an expert panel of judges.

The Thomas B. Fordham Prize for Distinguished Scholarship is given to a scholar who has made major contributions to education reform via research, analysis, and successful engagement in the war of ideas.

The Thomas B. Fordham Prize for Valor is awarded to a leader who has made major contributions to education reform through noteworthy accomplishments at the national, state, local, and/or school levels.

After painstaking review of dozens of nominees submitted in response to a public solicitation, the selection committee recommended—and the Foundation's trustees concurred—that the 2004 Fordham Prizes be awarded to a leading researcher and an outstanding practitioner.

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The winners are:

**Eric A. Hanushek**, Paul & Jean Hanna Senior Fellow, Hoover Institution, Stanford University—The Fordham Prize for Distinguished Scholarship

**Howard L. Fuller**, Distinguished Professor of Education and Founder/Director of the Institute for the Transformation of Learning, Marquette University—The Fordham Prize for Valor

A profile of Dr. Hanushek begins on p. 5. Dr. Fuller's profile follows on p.12.

This year's Fordham Prizes will be conferred in Washington on February 10, 2004.

## **ABOUT THE WINNERS**

The 2004 Fordham prize winners have toiled in different vineyards of education reform and have had diverse experiences as students, parents, and policymakers. Howard Fuller attended Catholic school until high school, lived in a Milwaukee housing project, and went on to a career as a black power activist and school superintendent. Eric Hanushek attended public schools, grew up in a Cleveland suburb, and went to the Air Force Academy before becoming an economist. Fuller has sought relentlessly to expand the educational options available to low-income minority students; Hanushek has primarily evaluated the productivity of school spending and resource allocation. Their hobbies are just as eclectic: Hanushek took up flying late in life and is currently studying for his instrument rating; Fuller, meanwhile, indulges his love of music by periodically serving as a DJ at dance parties.

Yet for all their differences, the two winners share several passions and beliefs about the K-12 education system. Though much of their work bears out what some would term "conservative" tenets of education reform, both men are lifelong liberals who have concluded with some trepidation that the agenda of most progressive education reformers is

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counterproductive. Each of the prize winners, in his own way, challenged the conventional wisdom about schooling long before it became fashionable to do so. Nevertheless, both honorees remain deeply committed to the cause of public schooling. Unlike some education critics who decry the public schools, both of these men have relied on public schools to educate their own children.

Perhaps most important, the two prize recipients share a powerful impulse to better the education of disadvantaged and minority children. It is no small coincidence that the two honorees currently have books on racial inequality in schooling on their bedside table: Fuller has been reading James Anderson's *The Education of Blacks in the South: 1860-1935* while Hanushek has been studying Stephan and Abigail Thernstrom's *No Excuses: Closing the Racial Gap in Learning*. As Fordham Foundation president Chester E. Finn, Jr. points out, "In the field of K-12 education, it's striking how often ideas, people, and organizations that get called 'conservative' turn out to be driven by the belief that poor kids can learn a great deal more than most of our schools are teaching them today and by the conviction that rectifying that situation must be education reformers' top priority—even if it means breaking some china." Without a doubt, Hanushek and Fuller have on occasion shattered the place settings of the education establishment. But their myth-debunking work has made major contributions to the cause of education reform, too and in so doing has helped to broaden opportunities for hundreds of thousands of American youth.

### **2004 PRIZE SELECTION COMMITTEE**

- Anthony S. Bryk, Director of the Center for School Improvement at the University of Chicago (Winner of the 2003 Prize for Distinguished Scholarship.)
- Paul Hill, Director of the Center on Reinventing Public Education at the University of Washington

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- Tom Loveless, Senior Fellow and Director of the Brown Center on Education Policy at the Brookings Institution
  - Bruno Manno, Senior Associate at the Annie E. Casey Foundation and trustee of the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation
  - Jay Mathews, Staff Writer at the Washington Post
  - Diane Ravitch, Senior Research Scholar at New York University and trustee of the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation
  - Lewis Solmon, Senior Vice-President of the Milken Family Foundation

## **2003 WINNERS**

In 2003, the first year in which these awards were conferred, the Fordham Prize for Distinguished Scholarship was given to Anthony Bryk of the University of Chicago and Paul A. Peterson of Harvard University. The Fordham Prize for Valor was awarded to E.D. Hirsch, Jr., of the University of Virginia.



**Birthplace:** Lakewood, Ohio. **Age:** 60.  
**Family:** Married, two grown children.  
**Education:** Public schools in Westside suburbs of Cleveland. **Teacher who had the greatest impact on his life:** John Kain, first college economics instructor.  
**High school diploma:** North Olmsted High. **Undergraduate college and major:** U.S. Air Force Academy, economics. **K-12 schooling of children:** Both children attended public schools in Pittsford, N.Y. High school was listed in *U.S. News'* top 100 schools—perhaps due to good performance, perhaps due to the money they spend. **Book currently by bedside:** Stephan and Abigail Thernstrom, *No Excuses: Closing the Racial Gap in Learning*. **Best movie in the last ten years:** *Matrix Reloaded*—but sees most movies on airplanes, leading to an unmemorable selection. **Likes to vacation in:** Europe, or ski in Colorado **Hobby:** Flying a single-engine Cessna 172 airplane. Currently working on obtaining his instrument rating. **Exercise:** Skiing, squash (high B ranking). **Accomplishment he'd most like to be remembered for:** Changing the way that people integrate research and economic policymaking. **One thing he wished he had done differently:** Married my current partner/friend/wife the first time around. **When he realized he first wanted to make K-12 education his main work:** While working on my PhD. thesis in 1967, soon after the Coleman Report was published. **Phrase that best captures the likelihood that American K-12 education will be a lot more effective for a lot more children by 2010:** I'd place the odds at 60-40 that things will improve noticeably.



### **ERIC A. HANUSHEK: THE ECONOMIST OF PUBLIC SCHOOLING**

University of Rochester economics professor Eric Hanushek was “stunned.” The year was 1981, two years prior to the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, the landmark Reagan-era indictment of America’s schools. For days, Hanushek had been methodically sifting through more than 125 studies of school reform done since 1965 to prepare a summary of the data for an upcoming school-finance court case. But the results of the literature review by this lifelong Democrat weren’t turning out as expected. Most of the evaluations showed no

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relationship at all between the amount of money schools spent per student or per teacher and levels of student achievement. And for every infrequent analysis that suggested spending could boost student performance, Hanushek soon stumbled on another study that indicated more resources could depress achievement, too.

Then there was the elephant in the room that education analysts had long downplayed: Since 1960, spending on students had soared and the number of pupils in an average classroom had dropped sharply—yet test scores had declined. In *Education Week*, and in a longer article in a fledgling academic journal, Hanushek subsequently reported his surprising findings. The results of the studies were both “consistent and startling,” he concluded. “The performance of students is not systematically related to the amount of money schools spend per student . . . . Differences in class size, education levels of teachers, and experience of teachers—the traditional focus of much school policy—are also not systematically related to student performance.”

Hanushek’s stark conclusions ran contrary to almost every tenet of both the ed school establishment and the teacher unions. Not surprisingly, Hanushek, who had never courted controversy before, was soon treated as “a lonely kook.” His heresy was to challenge what might be called the “‘More’ solution”: more funding and more teachers, leading smaller classes, would enable poor children and minority youth to get the same educational opportunities as affluent kids. But in the debate that ensued over decades to come, a funny thing happened: Hanushek’s unexpected, unwelcome findings were confirmed over and over again. Almost single-handedly, Hanushek went on to meticulously demolish the conventional wisdom that government could invest its way out of the education achievement problem. Ultimately, he also forced the resolutely anti-scientific world of education researchers to grapple for the first time with economic analysis and the importance of performance incentives in influencing student learning—from merit pay and accountability systems to vouchers and charter schools. Today, as a consequence, many

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education researchers feel obliged to measure “outputs” like student achievement, and not just inputs such as per-pupil expenditures and teacher-student ratios.

In more ways than one, Hanushek was an unlikely dissenter from the orthodoxy of the public school establishment. As a child growing up in the suburbs of Cleveland, he attended public schools from kindergarten through twelfth grade and developed a fondness for public education. A favored aunt was a teacher and principal in Cleveland’s schools and, years later, Hanushek’s own children would attend public schools from elementary school to graduation. Hanushek’s father, the manager of a small manufacturing firm, never attended college himself, and both parents drilled into young “Rick” Hanushek a sense of the importance of schooling at a young age. His undergraduate years at the Air Force Academy reinforced his belief that serving the nation and grappling with problems of inequality were worthy causes. But it was not until Hanushek enrolled as a doctoral student in the MIT economics department that he first studied issues of educational inequality in a sustained way.

At the time Hanushek obtained his Ph.D., faculty and graduate students down the street at Harvard were busy reassessing James Coleman’s epochal 1966 study of equal educational opportunity under the tutelage of Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Frederick Mosteller. Coleman’s controversial conclusion was that home environment and student peer groups outweighed school “inputs” like facilities, curriculum, and personnel in determining student achievement. Hanushek refused to believe it. Through the aegis of his former economics instructor, John Kain, Hanushek enrolled in the Moynihan-Mosteller seminar, and soon co-authored a paper with Kain casting doubts on the methodological rigor and conclusions of the Coleman report. He devoted his 1968 Ph.D. thesis to the Coleman report and racial inequality in the schools. “What drew me into the debate was that it seemed inconceivable that schools didn’t matter,” says Hanushek. “And I thought—and still think—that the inequality of outcomes in the educational system and the black-white achievement gap was a disaster for the nation.”

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In the 1970s, Hanushek continued to fill the role of dutiful economist and political liberal. For the RAND Corporation, he wrote about the value of good teachers; for economic journals, he penned pieces on housing markets and regression coefficients. Hanushek was very much a Democrat, too (and didn't switch his party registration to Republican until 30 years later, just before the 2000 election). So when he first stumbled upon his counterintuitive findings about school spending and class size in 1981, he knew full well that the left-leaning K-12 education establishment would be aghast.

Indeed, it didn't take long to let the dogs out. In the same issue of the *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* that Hanushek presented his technical analysis, the dean of Northwestern's ed school and one of his faculty members teamed up to write a patronizing critique of the "mised" economist. "Concepts such as 'output' and 'efficiency', which may be clear in the economic applications of . . . production models, lose their meaning when applied to education," the ed school professors explained. Hanushek, however, was undaunted. He continued to review the burgeoning research literature on school spending, resource levels, class size reduction, and student achievement for the next 20 years. Each time, the pattern of findings he had discovered by accident in 1981 was reconfirmed.

Hanushek has now reviewed some 400 studies of student performance and school resources and more than 275 analyses examining the impact of class size reduction on achievement. Under both headings, the vast majority of studies fail to find any link between resource levels and student performance. And in the small number of instances where a link is detectable, there is no strong or consistent pattern as to whether more resources help or hurt.

Meanwhile, the prima facie case against throwing money at school problems continues to grow. As Hanushek has demonstrated, real spending per student rose by more than 200 percent between 1960 and

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the 1990s, and the pupil-teacher ratio fell from about 26 students per teacher to 17, a drop of about a third. Yet student achievement has at best improved marginally, mostly among minorities. Today, Hanushek's critics no longer dismiss his analyses of outputs and efficiency out-of-hand. Instead, left-leaning economists and teacher union advocates contend that Hanushek exaggerates spending increases or that he minimizes the value of smaller classes. Yet even critics grudgingly allow that inflation-adjusted spending is up—and that a mountain of studies has failed to find a consistent connection between resources and achievement.

Hanushek's debunking of the "More" solution has been especially persuasive because he does *not* claim that schools are inconsequential or that "nothing works." "I came to believe that James Coleman mostly got it right," he says. "The measured characteristics of schools, the usual suspects, don't count. But people misinterpreted that to mean that schools don't matter." Much to the frustration of his critics, who would prefer to dismiss him as a right-wing naysayer, Hanushek has argued throughout his career that there are huge differences in quality between teachers and between schools. His research, dating back to 1970, has consistently shown that good teachers have an oversized impact on pupil achievement. Hanushek also concedes that, in some cases, more spending and reduced class size can boost achievement. Nonetheless, he doubts that policymakers, Democrat and Republican alike, know how to pinpoint the right circumstances and classrooms for successful intervention, much less refrain from pursuing wasteful blanket remedies.

Unlike many academics, Hanushek believes in translating his research into policy. He has testified numerous times both before Congress and as an expert witness in state school finance court cases, and served as Deputy Director of the Congressional Budget Office for two years in the mid-1980s. Yet, like any fair-minded scholar, Hanushek has followed the findings, not his political prejudices. He opposed GOP governor Pete Wilson's 1996 across-the-board program to reduce the size of K-3 classes in California, and warned prophetically that the ensuing rush to hire many

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new teachers might result in an influx of mediocre instructors into urban schools, lowering student achievement. At the same time, he also objected, in a 1998 paper for the Progressive Policy Institute, to President Clinton's plans to spend \$12 billion over seven years to reduce class sizes in grade 1-3 and hire another 100,000 teachers.

In addition to his own groundbreaking research, Hanushek has had a major impact on the methodology of education analysis. If economics is the dismal science, education research might be said to be sometimes dismal but rarely scientific. Inevitably, education researchers must tease out numerous variables in their assessments of school reforms: Is family background at work, the age of the child, the quality of the teacher, the size of the class, the nature of the neighborhood, or some other factor? The mishmash-evaluations that regularly follow have been likened to a soggy waffle.

Unlike medical researchers, or even social policy analysts who assess welfare and housing policies, education analysts rarely employ random assignment experiments to test K-12 interventions. They have similarly looked askance at economists' efforts to evaluate the efficiency, effectiveness, and productivity of school reform efforts. When Hanushek began his 1981 review on school spending, economists who studied K-12 schooling essentially stuck to modeling the returns on human capital, calculating the financial payoff to workers for extra years of schooling. Almost single-handedly, Hanushek introduced the economists' study of production functions (*i.e.*, how much will a measured change in inputs alter outcomes) into the world of education research.

As might be anticipated, Hanushek's studies of school reform productivity also sparked interest among education analysts in the importance of incentives, long a basic tenet of economics. Hanushek's work demonstrated that there is little value in throwing money at "the system" when the system itself is the problem. "Essentially, nobody within schools has much riding on whether or not students achieve at a high level,"

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Hanushek laments. “The expected pay and career of a good teacher are about the same as that of a bad teacher.” Today, much of Hanushek’s research is directed at studying whether the feeble performance incentives of the K-12 system can be strengthened. His most recent research has shown that students in states with strong accountability systems and testing regimens are faring better than peers in states with weak or non-existent accountability programs, leading Hanushek to conclude that policymakers should wield the carrot *and* the stick. In contrast to the typical top-down, do-as-I-say approach to education reform, Hanushek favors refashioning performance incentives to promote a more entrepreneurial model of school reform. Reduced to a campaign slogan, his take-away message might well be *“It’s the incentives, stupid.”*

In the two decades since a little-known economist at the University of Rochester first reported his unexpected findings about school spending, much has changed. Hanushek’s work is now the touchstone for other researchers in his field—a Google search for “Eric Hanushek” pulls up more than 13,000 references. Hanushek himself has gone on to serve on four committees of the National Academy of Sciences, two of which he chaired, and an appointment at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University in 2000. “In 1981, I was offering more of a hypothesis about the allocation of school resources and spending,” Hanushek says. “Today, I think that hypothesis is pretty widely accepted as fact.” Thanks to Hanushek’s ingenuity, thoroughness, and tenacity, the one-time “lonely kook” of school reform now has plenty of company.

**Birthplace:** Shreveport, La. **Age:** 63.  
**Family:** Married, two sons, two daughters, and one stepdaughter. **Education:** Catholic elementary and middle schools in Shreveport and Milwaukee, public high school in Milwaukee. **Teacher who had greatest impact on his life:** High school basketball coach Vic Anderson—we were more than just players to him. Later in life I'd get letters, advice from Vic. **High school diploma:** North Division High. **Undergraduate college and major:** Carroll College, Waukesha, Wisconsin, sociology. **K-12 schooling of children:** Public high schools in North Carolina. **Book currently by bedside:** James Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South: 1860-1935*. **Best movie in the last ten years:** *A Beautiful Mind*. **Likes to vacation in:** Jamaica. **Hobby:** Music—it keeps me sane. I have downloaded almost 14,000 songs, mostly R&B and hip-hop; also serve as DJ at parties. I love music and watching people dance to what I'm playing. **Exercise:** Treadmill. **Accomplishment he'd most like to be remembered for:** Consistently standing up for the least powerful in our society, with a focus on people of African descent. **One thing he wished he had done differently:** No comment. **When he first realized he wanted to make K-12 education his main work:** After getting involved in the struggle to save my high school in 1977. **Phrase that best captures the likelihood that American K-12 education will be a lot more effective for a lot more children by 2010:** Maybe yes, maybe no.



### HOWARD L. FULLER: THE CHAMPION OF CHOICE

When a fellow alumnus called in 1977, Howard Fuller knew he had to get involved in the fight to save his old high school. North Division High in Milwaukee had “meant everything” to Fuller. He had played center on its championship basketball team in 1958, and had never forgotten the thrill of starring on the first team from the city of Milwaukee to go to the state tournament. Two decades later, the buddies he had made at “North” were still among his best friends. But Fuller’s affection for his alma mater was hardly unusual. The school board’s plan to close North and open



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a citywide magnet school in its place—all ostensibly in the name of racial integration—had dismayed dozens of prominent blacks who had attended the popular neighborhood school. Already, students had walked out in protest. Soon, Fuller—joined by fellow alums like state lawmaker Annette “Polly” Williams—was leading the protest rallies, marching with hundreds of students on the headquarters of the Milwaukee public school system.

Over a year later, Fuller and his allies won a rare victory, forcing the school board to keep North Division open as a neighborhood school. But the showdown with the board made Fuller rethink how “black power” could be used to bolster educational opportunity and student achievement among low-income African American children. Fuller had long been active in the black power and Pan-Africanist movements, and he believed deeply that empowering the disenfranchised—not integration per se—was the ultimate aim of the struggle for racial equality. More often than not, busing and forced integration of black and white schoolchildren had seemed to do little more than kindle white flight and weaken once-proud black institutions. With his newfound passion for K-12 education reform, Fuller headed for graduate school and completed a Ph.D. at Marquette in 1985. His doctoral thesis, on Milwaukee Public School (MPS) desegregation and busing policies, only confirmed his suspicion that local officials had deliberately designed desegregation to benefit white schoolchildren at the expense of black kids.

In the two decades since he quietly completed his Ph.D., Howard Fuller has gone on to become one of the nation’s most outspoken and effective advocates for educational choice and one of its most impassioned practitioners. He was an important backer of the groundbreaking 1990 legislation that created the Milwaukee Parental Choice program, which enabled low-income students in that city to begin attending nonsectarian schools at public expense for the first time. The following year, school-board critic Fuller unexpectedly became the superintendent of Milwaukee’s vast and troubled school system. During his four years as superintendent, from 1991 to 1995, Milwaukee was the nation’s epicenter

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of the school choice battle. Fuller fought tirelessly to expand the voucher program and other educational options, including charter schools and privatizing failed schools. Even after stepping down from the superintendent's job, Fuller has soldiered on in the choice wars, establishing the influential Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO), a national organization of African-American community activists who promote a wide range of schooling options for low-income children. Through all the battles, Fuller stubbornly clung to his 60's-era credo of "power to the people" as a guiding principle of policy. And through it all, the black power activist has been called every epithet in the left-wing armory by teacher union critics and anti-choice liberals. "I've been called a sell-out, an Uncle Tom, a right-wing opportunist, the white man's dupe, all kinds of names," says Fuller. "But you have a responsibility to stand up and fight for what you believe. And if you are not willing to take the weight, you can't exercise leadership."

The liberal assault on Fuller is bizarrely at odds with the positions that he has taken throughout his life—many of which have been to the *left* of his critics. Unlike in the late 1960s, when liberal thinkers like Christopher Jencks touted school voucher pilot programs to the Office of Economic Opportunity, the intellectual proponents and financial backers of the pro-choice movement today tend to be conservatives. Fuller, however, shatters that mold. He is equally in his element with a bullhorn in his hand at a protest rally as with a microphone at a Heritage Foundation seminar. And far from being a reflexive foe of unions, Fuller is a former AFL-CIO union organizer who knows from personal experience how poverty and discrimination can restrict opportunities. He lived in a housing project until ninth grade, and his mother supported the family by working as a maid, folding towels in a soot-filled factory, and as a clerk in the county hospital. As a young man, Fuller imbibed the revolutionary rhetoric of Franz Fanon, not the free-market musings of F.A. Hayek.

The themes of education, choice, and black self-determination run like ribbons through Fuller's life, long before he became involved with

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Milwaukee school reform. His mother and grandmother drilled into the young boy the significance of getting a good education. Today, 50 years later, Fuller can still recall his mother taking him by Milwaukee's forbidding juvenile detention home to warn him to "stay in school or this is where you'll end up." After attending Carroll College, a local institution, Fuller dedicated himself to the black power movement, first taking a job with the Urban League in Chicago before heading in 1965 to North Carolina, where he spent the next decade. In North Carolina, Fuller developed into a full-fledged radical. He headed an AFSCME union of non-academic employees at Duke University and directed an organizing effort at Duke's Medical Center. He organized community groups in poor black communities around the state and trained students during summer months to become community activists. In 1969, a group of black students trained by Fuller took over an administrative building at Duke University to protest the lack of an Afro-American studies department, temporarily renaming the building the "Malcolm X" center. Weary of his battles with Duke, Fuller decided to set up an alternative college for blacks—and promptly named it the Malcolm X Liberation University.

For the next four years, Fuller served as the president and founder of the Malcolm X Liberation University in Durham and Greensboro, N.C. This institution was never large—at its peak it had about 60 students—and Fuller and other instructors helped students organize their own engineering, agricultural, and teaching corps until the school disbanded in 1973. But Fuller looks back fondly on his days at Malcolm X. It was there that he explored the historic role of Pan-Africanist thought and the writings of Marcus Garvey and W.E.B. Dubois. The students at Malcolm X even gave Fuller a Nigerian name, Owusu Sadaukai, which some acquaintances still call him today. Translated from the Hausa dialect, Owusu Sadaukai fittingly enough refers to "one who clears the way for others" and "one who gathers strength from his ancestors to lead his people."

With his usual passion, Fuller also threw himself into the African liberation movement. In 1972, he spent a month in Mozambique, marching with

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guerilla troops who were trying to unseat the Portuguese colonial government. Fuller, who was unarmed, was lucky to survive unharmed after the Portuguese dropped bombs and fired machine guns on the rebels' position. Back in the states, Fuller organized the first African Liberation Day demonstration in May 1972 in Washington, D.C. As many as 50,000 people attended. "Everything I have done I see as an extension of the same goal," Fuller says, looking back. "My aim has always been to give lower income families and black people more control over their lives."

After returning to Milwaukee and completing his Ph.D., Fuller got his first real opportunity to support low-income residents on a large scale when he took over the Milwaukee County Department of Health and Human Services in mid-1988. For the next two years, Fuller oversaw some 5,500 employees in a sprawling city agency that included the department of social services, welfare, youth services, elderly care, the juvenile detention center, the county medical complex, and the largest mental health facility in Wisconsin. As head of health and human services, Fuller witnessed a heartbreaking parade of misery and dependency that left him deeply worried about his hometown, particularly the terrible conditions facing children who lived in poverty and attended Milwaukee's woeful public schools. In 1991, high school students' grade average in Milwaukee was a pathetic D+, and less than 40 percent of black students who started ninth grade graduated four years later.

Milwaukee has long been one of the nation's most segregated cities, and to Fuller the need to boost black achievement and community autonomy seemed to far outweigh the continued fruitless pursuit of integration and busing. In 1987, Fuller, with the support of fellow North Division alum Polly Williams, came up with the idea of creating a separate and largely all-black inner-city school district. But Fuller's plan died in the state legislature the following year, forcing him and Williams to reassess their strategy. "Our thinking," says Fuller, "was that if the legislature was not going to let us create a separate district to educate the kids, then you should set us free and not confine us. However, the evolution toward

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vouchers was much more a product of our struggle than of anyone sitting down in the basement reading Milton Friedman.”

For Fuller, vouchers had an obvious appeal. He believed the old adage that “money talks” and figured that vouchers would empower previously helpless families and kids. Once school officials realized they could lose not just a student but also the funding that came with that pupil, poor children suddenly had value. “I believed then, and I believe now, that if you have money in America, you have choice,” says Fuller. “If you have money, and the local school doesn’t work well, you pick up and move to a better district, or you send your child to private school. Vouchers are just another way to empower black people and give them more of the same educational options as other people.”

When the 1990 Milwaukee Parental Choice program debuted, and in the decade that followed, as the program expanded to allow students to attend religious schools, anti-voucher spokesmen predicted all sorts of disaster. John Benson, the former Wisconsin State Superintendent of Public Instruction asked rhetorically whether a terrorist like “Timothy McVeigh will start the next church in Milwaukee and see this as a profit-making venture and solicit enrollment. That’s going to happen. There will be some horror stories.” State legislator Mordecai Lee warned on national television that Hamas might be able to open a choice school in Milwaukee. Other, less extreme critics argued that vouchers would cause public schools to lose students, reduce spending per pupil, and lower achievement, as the most motivated students used vouchers to leave public schools behind. None of those predictions came true. From 1990 to 2003, MPS enrollment increased by more than 5,000 students (a rise of about 6 percent), real spending per pupil grew by almost 40 percent, and when the use of vouchers expanded dramatically in recent years, academic achievement of MPS students rose modestly and the dropout rate dipped. Most important, a series of now famous studies showed that black children who went to private schools on vouchers in Milwaukee did better academically than other blacks who stayed in public schools.

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While vouchers were certainly an important innovation during Fuller's tenure as superintendent, they were only a part of his reform agenda. In effect, Fuller envisioned that schools should serve as semi-autonomous units that compete for school children. He decentralized budget-allocation decision making down to the individual schools, strengthened curriculum requirements and accountability measures, and worked imaginatively to broaden choice through other options, such as charter schools and African-immersion academies. Thanks to Fuller, all ninth graders in MPS schools now take algebra, and individual schools control most district operating funds. In other areas, Fuller feuded repeatedly with the school board and failed to obtain approval for private companies to manage several failing schools. Voters also overwhelmingly rejected Fuller's \$336 million school bond referendum, which would have provided construction funds to build 15 new schools and shrink class sizes in the K-2 years. When a newly-elected teachers' union-backed slate threatened to paralyze the school board in 1995, Fuller quit, saying he refused to "die a death of a thousand cuts." But no one much doubts that after Fuller became superintendent, Milwaukee was ground zero for school reform—and stayed there throughout the 1990s. In the end, one of Fuller's greatest legacies is that he shook up the system, setting precedents that created momentum for additional pro-choice options and expanded voucher programs. Today, Milwaukee parents have more tax-supported educational choices than parents in almost any city in the nation. In addition to vouchers, their children can attend charter schools, specialty schools, contract schools serving at-risk students, and public schools made accessible by state and district-wide open enrollment policies.

Today, Fuller continues to stay in touch with schools, administrators, and teachers in the MPS. And since founding the Black Alliance for Educational Options in 1999, he has spread the pro-choice message through BAEO's burgeoning grassroots network of African-American activists. From just 50 members in 1999, BAEO has grown to more than 2,000 members, and boasts 18 chapters in 13 states and the District of

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Columbia. It recently won a \$4 million grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to create 15 new high schools, and the organization has helped broaden the parental choice agenda to include not just means-tested vouchers but public-private partnerships, historic schools, cyberschools, charter schools, black independent schools, and homeschooling. Its memorable ads in major newspapers and the Washington, D.C., television market feature young black students and their parents repeating Fuller's critique that "parental choice is widespread—unless you're poor."

The multi-million-dollar ad campaign has been so effective that one anti-voucher group, People for the American Way, released a 16-page "Special Report" last July, decrying that a number of conservative foundations were BAEO donors. Yet in seeking to tar BAEO as a right-wing puppet, the report neglected to mention that conservatives, just like liberals, do not hold monolithic views of vouchers. Some conservatives, for example, continue to object to vouchers as unnecessary government intrusion in the private sector and a backdoor form of income redistribution. More important, the critique failed to note that BAEO—unlike many conservative pro-voucher organizations—opposes a universal system in which vouchers would be available for upper- and middle-income families, too.

Fuller, meanwhile, remains largely undeterred by criticisms from his former liberal allies, despite the patronizing insinuation that he has been "duped" by the white man. "I learned back in the 1960s that you have permanent interests but you don't have permanent friends," he says. "You don't have to share the same world view." Fuller's stubborn pursuit of choice and black empowerment is also due partly to his refusal to countenance the guilt-by-association tactics of his critics. "People on the left attack me because some foundations and individuals who support vouchers also oppose affirmative action and the minimum wage," says Fuller. "All I can say is that I support affirmative action. I support the minimum wage. And I support school choice."

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Still, Fuller allows that some of the attacks “sting a bit. I don’t want to act like this has all been easy.” He was particularly disappointed after Polly Williams dropped her support for expanded vouchers in Wisconsin in 1998 and went on to suggest that Fuller had become “the person the white people have selected to lead the choice movement now because I don’t want to cooperate.” Williams’s comment “was unfortunate,” says Fuller, “because that was just the kind of charge that we used to defend her against in the past. But I still think Polly was heroic—and we wouldn’t be where we are today without her.”

About 15 years ago, Howard Fuller started spinning records and working as a DJ in his off hours for fun. Other men of Fuller’s generation—and more than a few neo-conservatives—have bemoaned the development of rap music, but Fuller listened carefully to the messages of the young hip-hop artists. The mid-1990s group Arrested Development, with its Pan-African references, soon became one of Fuller’s favorites. Their song “Pride” became a personal anthem of sorts for Fuller—and it’s not hard to see why. In “Pride,” the members of Arrested Development boisterously declare: “Whether it’s in style to keep the fight/I tread these waters and make waves God knows/and I will fight until my dying day/and even after that, my ghost resides with pride.”



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This report from the Thomas B. Fordham Institute is the first significant study of the organizations that authorize charter schools. The report examines 23 states and the District of Columbia to determine how supportive they are of charter schools, how good a job their authorizers are doing, and how policy makers could strengthen their states' charter programs. Fifteen states earned grades of "B-" or better for their authorizers' work, but just four received similar marks for the policy environment in which charter schools and authorizers function. Massachusetts and Texas led the pack while California, Pennsylvania, and New Mexico brought up the rear.

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### ***Better Leaders for America's Schools: A Manifesto (May 2003)***

This report, published jointly by the Fordham Institute and The Broad Foundation, contends that American public education faces a "crisis in leadership" that cannot be alleviated from traditional sources of school principals and superintendents. Its signers do not believe this crisis can be fixed by conventional strategies for preparing, certifying and employing education leaders. Instead, they urge that first-rate leaders be sought outside the education field, earn salaries on par with their peers in other professions, and gain new authority over school staffing, operations and budgets.

### ***The Best of Both Worlds: Blending History and Geography in the K-12 Curriculum (February 2003)***

Geography plays a crucial role in shaping history, and the study of history provides an important context for students learning geography, but K-12 teachers rarely take advantage of the complementary nature of these two subjects by teaching both in one integrated curriculum. This new report shows how the study of U.S. history can be enriched by blending geography into the curriculum.

The centerpiece of the report is an innovative curriculum framework for studying the American past, a course in which each historical period is supplemented and enriched by the introduction of relevant geography.

### ***Can Failing Schools be Fixed? (January 2003)***

Will the sanctions for failing schools laid out in No Child Left Behind succeed in turning those schools around? In this new report, author Ronald C. Brady draws on the results of previous state and district efforts to overhaul failing schools to provide a glimpse at what may be expected from NCLB-style interventions. He finds that no intervention strategy has a success rate greater than 50 percent. Given that many interventions are unlikely to yield improved schools, he urges policymakers to consider additional options for children trapped in failing educational institutions.

### ***The Approval Barrier to Suburban Charter Schools (September 2002)***

Why haven't charter schools taken hold in suburban areas in most states? In this report, Pushpam Jain takes a close look at three states with high proportions of charter schools in the suburbs to see how they managed to introduce charter schools, and then compares them to one state with only a few charter schools to see what is blocking the spread of charters there. His conclusion: if a state sets up a system for authorizing charter schools where the only authorizing body doesn't want charter schools, there won't be many charter schools!

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