

Town Tuitioning in Maine: Parental Choice of Secondary Schools in Rural Communities

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the practice of town tuitioning in Maine, including its historical development and current patterns by region and school type. It argues that town tuitioning provides substantial numbers of rural high school students and their parents with opportunities to choose high schools, and explores that possible implications of this traditional practice for the current educational policy debates over parental choice of school.

INTRODUCTION

In much of the United States, public school districts have been organized in units large enough to support their own schools. In some states, public schools were originally organized on a county-wide basis. In other states, the original small, local units have been consolidated into larger independent school districts. But in several of the more rural states, towns (including those with very small populations) have traditionally been responsible for the provision of education to their residents, and to a significant degree remain so even today. In Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont, this tradition of town responsibility for education gave rise to a practice known as "town tuitioning."

Town tuitioning is the practice of towns paying tuition for their resident students to attend schools not directly managed by those towns. Usually, the towns involved have very small populations, although one city — Saco, Maine (pop. 15,181) — also tuitions its students, as do several towns with populations of 2,500 or more. Generally, the towns described in this paper have their own public elementary schools and tuition their high school students only, although some

very sparsely populated towns tuition all of their students. All three northern New England states — Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont — allow towns to tuition their students as an alternative to joining larger school administrative units. Furthermore, Maine and Vermont permit towns to tuition their students into non-sectarian private schools. Ten private high schools in Maine, and five in Vermont, enroll a majority of their students through town tuitioning.

The practice of town tuitioning in northern New England dates back to the nineteenth century. Until relatively recently, this practice went unnoticed by the rest of the nation. But that began to change in 1978, with the publication of *Education by Choice: The Case for Family Control* by John Coons and Steven Sugarman, which contains a brief description of town tuitioning in and around St. Johnsbury, Vermont. The National Governors Association, chaired at the time by Tennessee Gov. Lamar Alexander (now U.S. Secretary of Education), also took note of town tuitioning in Vermont in its 1986 report *Time for Results: The Governors' 1991 Report on Education*. In both cases, the practice of town tuitioning in Vermont was cited in support of arguments for parental choice of school.

Acknowledgements: *The authors wish to express their appreciation to the Penquis Superintendents' Association and the Maine State Superintendents' Association for financial support necessary to conducting research for this paper. In addition, we wish to acknowledge the cooperation of the Maine Department of Education, and especially Alton Sutherland of the Division of Management Information, in providing access to the data on which this study is based.*

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Not all town tuitioned students have a choice of school. In some cases, towns sign contracts with receiving schools which effectively bind all or most students to a particular school. In other cases, the combination of geography and bus transportation work to severely restrict school choice. But enough students in enough different towns do have choices among schools to offer a very interesting "experiment by nature" (Bronfenbrenner, 1978) on perhaps the most controversial school reform proposal of the late twentieth century. The fact that this "natural experiment" in Maine and Vermont includes private schools makes it all the more interesting.

While town tuitioning in Vermont has received some national attention, the same practice in Maine has been virtually ignored. This paper focuses on town tuitioning in Maine, with appropriate comparisons to the published literature on the practice in Vermont. The paper begins with an overview of the policy issues regarding parental choice. Next, it reviews the limited research on school choice with respect to comparisons between rural, suburban, and urban areas. The spread of state policy initiatives promoting school choice, primarily in the more rural states west of the Mississippi River, is then briefly summarized. Turning then to Maine, the paper summarizes the extent of school choice in the state through a variety of different options, of which town tuitioning is but one. Next, the history, extent and distribution of town tuitioning in Maine is described. The paper suggests the possible implications of town tuitioning in Maine for the national debate over school choice. It concludes by suggesting questions for further research, some of which are now being investigated.

POLICY ISSUES

The concept of parental choice of school has been at the center of much controversy in recent years. Advocates believe parental choice of school would create competition among schools for students and thus force schools to find ways to improve their programs. Such competition would therefore offer a potential solution to the problem of low student achievement in America's schools relative to other countries and to the needs of employers competing in a global economy. Children of low income families would benefit most because their schools are currently the worst and their parents at present have the fewest options. Advocates also argue that school choice would empower parents, enabling them to become more involved in their children's education. They say

that there is no need for the uniformity that now exists among public schools because there is no one best form of schooling for all children and all educators. Finally, they argue that schools of choice plans which included private schools would free education from the bureaucratization and political control that now stifles autonomy and creativity in schools. Schools would then be free to concentrate their efforts and resources on improving their effectiveness, benefitting students most and resulting in the greatest gains in academic achievement (Chubb and Moe, 1990; Coleman, 1981; Coons and Sugarman, 1978; Friedman, 1962, 1980; Paulu, 1989).

While Presidents Reagan and Bush and Education Secretaries Bennett, Cavazos and Alexander have been active advocates of parental choice, their efforts to institute federal parental choice programs have been blocked by previous Congresses. However, President Bush has once again submitted several proposals to promote parental choice as part of his *America 2000* educational reform strategy, some portions of which appear likely to win Congressional approval. Many elements of *America 2000* are contained in S. 1141, the Bush Administration's proposed "America 2000 Excellence in Education Act". Among the choice initiatives contained in Title V of S. 1141 are: (1) proposed changes in the Chapter 1 program of ESEA which would transfer per-child shares of Chapter 1 funds to parents of children participating in local school choice programs if the local education agency determines that it is not feasible or efficient to provide chapter 1 services at the receiving school, such funds to be used for supplementary compensatory education services or for transportation to/from school; (2) a \$200 million fund of incentive grants to local districts to establish parental choice policies that permit choices among public and private schools; and (3) a \$30 million program to highlight model choice programs and help states make choice plans work. Up to now, state governments and local districts have been responsible for the adoption and implementation of programs clearly identified as parental choice programs. Bush's proposals are apparently intended to encourage further development of choice programs at the state and local levels (Pitsch, 1991; Olson, 1991).

Critics believe that parental choice of school would not result in school improvement because the "consumers" will not be able to distinguish between schools on the basis of quality and the "providers" will do whatever to keep enrollment up (i.e. resort to marketing, packaging and advertising). Professional

educators, they say, are more qualified than parents to make decisions about how to bring about desired improvements in education. Critics believe that parental choice would only exacerbate the problem of educational inequities based on family background, especially if private schools are allowed to participate in the choice program. They believe that better educated parents would be better able to use choice opportunities to benefit their own children, and that these parents' choices would siphon off the best students and educators from community schools, leaving the students and educators that remain without effective student role models. Schools would have incentives to increase informal screening and sorting to bolster their achievement profiles. Parental involvement could actually decrease as students attend schools outside their communities and further away from their homes. Parental choice, they say, would drain resources from the schools that need it most, and would make it more difficult for educators to plan effective programs. Private school choice would also undermine democratic control of schools and would allow schools to be formed that promoted values contrary to good citizenship (Bastian, 1990; Evans, 1990; Kirst, 1981; Moore and Davenport, 1990).

SCHOOL CHOICE IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

In addition to the above criticisms of school choice in general, serious consideration must be given to the possible consequences of school choice for rural communities. Schools in predominantly rural areas of the United States enroll almost a third of the nation's school children. With their relatively sparse populations and resulting longer distances between schools, the range of available school options within a given distance is more limited than in more urbanized areas. In addition, numerous studies of rural communities have emphasized the importance of local community ties (DeYoung, 1987; Hollingshead, 1949; Peshkin, 1978; Vidich and Bensman, 1968). The very limited research data available thusfar with respect to the incidence of school choice in urban, suburban and rural areas suggests that rural parents are less likely than parents in urban or suburban areas to exercise a choice in school enrollment. Nonetheless, some families even in rural areas do choose schools, either through residential choice or choice among schools at the time of enrollment (Darling-Hammond and Kirby, 1985; Williams, Hancher and Hutner, 1983).

However, important policy changes, with great potential for changing the way rural Americans think about school choice, have occurred since 1985. The governors and legislatures of several states, mostly in the mid-west and west, have been on the forefront of enacting controversial new parental choice of school programs during the past several years. Minnesota has the most extensive state-mandated parental choice programs, including a post-secondary enrollment options act (1985), a high school graduation incentive program (1987) and an inter-district open enrollment options law (1988). Nathan and Jennings (1990) report that 30-40% of students taking advantage of three new enrollment options (Postsecondary Enrollment Options, High School Graduation Incentives and Area Learning Centers) are residents of rural areas. Only the program under which public schools contract with private alternative schools, of the four Minnesota programs they studied, serves primarily urban residents.

Other states with large rural populations have followed Minnesota's lead. Iowa, Arkansas and Nebraska adopted inter-district open enrollment options laws in 1989, while Utah and Idaho followed suit in 1990 and Colorado authorized a pilot test of such a program that same year. In March, 1991, Massachusetts became the first primarily urbanized state to adopt a state-wide inter-district open enrollment plan. Colorado and Washington adopted laws in 1990 requiring districts to adopt policies permitting intra-district transfers. Eight states in addition to Minnesota (Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Maine, Utah and Washington) have some form of post-secondary options law on their books.

While the number of state programs promoting choice has increased in recent years, choice programs have also come under attack in a number of states. Colorado adopted a "second chance" program for high school dropouts aged 16-21 in 1985, but repealed it in 1987. In November 1990, Oregon voters defeated a referendum on the state ballot which would have established an income tax credit of up to \$2,500 for private, religious or home education, while mandating public school open enrollment.

Northern New England, another predominantly rural section of the country, has also had its experiments with parental choice plans. The Nixon Administration attempted to introduce an unregulated, free market voucher plan in several school districts in New Hampshire, but this effort failed when residents of the six towns involved voted against it (Donaldson, 1977). Epsom (NH) recently developed a local variation on the concept of state or federal income tax deductions or

credits for private school tuition: a property tax abatement for property owners who sponsor a high school student's private education. Over 80% of public school revenues in New Hampshire come from local property taxes (DiegmueLLer, 1991).

The State of Maine offers an informative case study of school choice in rural areas. By most measures, Maine is a very rural state, with only one city (Portland) having a population exceeding 50,000. No survey of Maine families comparable to those described above exists to document the extent to which these families engage in choice of school. However, numerous

parental choice options exist for those families who wish to take advantage of them (Maddaus and Mirochnik, 1991). These are listed in Table 1.

The three northern New England states of Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont share the distinction of having the longest standing programs offering parents choices among schools, in the form of town tuitioning. Although not enacted as a parental choice program in the contemporary sense, town tuitioning does offer students and their parents real options in at least some communities. Some parents have been eager to take advantage of this fact.

Table 1
Parental Choice Options in Maine

Enrollment Option	Enrollment/Year
(1) consideration of schools in choice of residence	unknown
(2) secondary vocational schools	6,913 (1989-90)*
(3) inter-district transfers based on superintendents' agreements	343 (1990-91)**
(4) secondary alternative education programs for drop-outs and at risk students	645 (1990-91)** to 1,800 (1990-91)***
(5) ungraded, multi-graded and transitional programs in elementary schools	unknown
(6) special education and gifted and talented education	unknown
(7) post-secondary options program	57 (1990-91)**
(8) town tuitioned students	
- in public schools	5,546 (4/1/89)****
- in approved private schools	4,073 (4/1/89)****
- in out-of-state schools	40 (4/1/89)****
(9) privately tuitioned students	
- in approved private schools	8,665 (1989-90)*****
- in unapproved private schools	unknown
(10) home schooled students	1,521 (3/1991)*****

* Maine Department of Education, Division of Secondary Vocational Education

** Survey of district superintendents (response rate: 48%)

*** Maine Department of Education, Office of Truancy, Dropout and Alternative Education (estimate)

**** School District and Approved Private School Enrollment Reports to the Maine Department of Education

***** Maine Educational Facts (1989), Maine Department of Education

***** Maine Department of Education (total applications received)

HISTORY OF TOWN TUITIONING IN MAINE

The origins of town tuitioning can be traced back into the nineteenth century, when the idea of free, public high school education was first becoming widely accepted. In much of the United States, schooling in rural areas is provided by counties, which were generally large enough in population to ensure efficient provision of education in grades 9-12, or by independent school districts, which could be consolidated relatively easily. (Hawaii is the most extreme case, with a single, state-wide school district!) But in New England, the basic governmental unit responsible for providing education was the town. Many towns were very small, and some were very sparsely populated. As the demand for and complexity of education increased, especially at the secondary level, local and state education officials in New England sought ways of providing high school education that were both cost effective and consistent with their belief in local control. Town tuitioning was one result.

By the Civil War, educational reformers had established common schools (as public elementary schools were then known), eliminated fees paid by parents and introduced the concept of compulsory education at the elementary level. But in most communities, secondary education, if it existed at all, was provided by private academies, run mostly by local clergy and business leaders, and attended by a small percentage of the population. As late as 1900, less than five percent of the population of the United States graduated from high school.

After the Civil War, educational reformers launched the free high school movement. In 1873, the Maine Legislature enacted the Free High School Act (Chapter 124) which included the following provisions: (1) towns could establish free high schools and receive state funds for up to 50% of the support of such schools, up to a limit of \$500 (a substantial sum in those days!); (2) trustees of private academies could turn their buildings and other assets over to their towns to be used as free high schools; and (3) alternatively, towns could pay tuition to the trustees of the private academies for the education of town residents. Several academies in Maine had become free high schools (or public high schools, to use the more modern term) even before this act was passed, and schools such as Edward Little Institute in Auburn and Calais Academy soon joined their ranks. On the other hand, private schools such as Foxcroft Academy, Bluehill (George Stevens)

Academy, Lincoln Academy and Washington Academy remained private, and in due time they received town tuitioned students (Finley, 1941; Healy, 1949; Linscott, 1937; Morse, 1939).

In 1909, the Maine legislature enacted a law (Chapter 62) which "required any town not maintaining a high school to pay the tuition of its students to an approved secondary school. Each town paying tuition of its students would receive the same proportion of state aid to the maximum of \$30 as those which maintained a high school" (Anderson, 1939). Private academies were by then considered approved secondary schools.

One private academy that succeeded for many years in serving "Maine students, especially those to whom secondary education was not otherwise available, those whose towns had no high schools and whose parents had no money," (Tracy, 1988, p.33) was Higgins Classical Institute in Charleston. Ann Tracy describes her father, William Tracy, principal of Higgins from 1917 to 1948, engaged in "soliciting students", also known as "road work" (p. 35), to maintain enrollment. Student enrollment at Higgins peaked in the 1950's.

In 1957, the Maine legislature passed the School Administrative District Act, otherwise known as the Sinclair Act after its chief sponsor, State Senator Roy Sinclair of Pittsfield. The Sinclair Act allowed towns to join together to form unified school administrative districts (SADs), each with a single high school and a single school board for the district as a whole. In some cases, SADs brought together towns which had each supported high schools so small that they could not provide the range of courses which educators by 1957 felt were necessary. But in other cases, SADs included towns that had formerly tuitioned their high school students to private high schools. Higgins Classical Institute was especially hard hit by this change. "In 1954, more than 50 towns were paying tuition to Higgins; by 1968, half of those towns belonged to SADs." (Tracy, 1988, pp. 45-46) One may infer from Ann Tracy's account that more Maine parents may have had enrollment options through town tuitioning before 1957 than since that date. To be sure, some private high schools survived. But Higgins was not among them, finally closing its doors in 1975.

Yet another chapter in the history of town tuitioning concerns the tuitioning of students into religious schools. As recently as the 1970's, students were town tuitioned into several Catholic and Christian (i.e. fundamentalist Protestant) high schools in the state. Separation of church and state had not been a major

issue historically, and several of the early private academies in Maine began under religious sponsorship. Over time, most of them had cut their ties with the religious groups that founded them and became independent. Prior to 1980, however, this had not been a condition for receiving town tuitioned students.

In 1980, the tuitioning of students into religious schools was challenged on the grounds that it violated the first amendment to the United States Constitution. The State Attorney General issued a ruling upholding the complaint and banning towns from paying tuition to religious schools. At the time, John Bapst High School in Bangor, which was affiliated with the Catholic Diocese of Portland, enrolled the largest number of town tuitioned students attending a religious-affiliated high school anywhere in the state. Faced with the loss of these students, the school closed. It reopened the next fall as John Bapst Memorial High School, an independent private school governed by a group of private individuals that included parents of its students. Several Christian high schools also lost students, but elected to remain open with only private-paying students.

Although the Attorney General's ruling had the greatest impact on John Bapst, the initial complaint may have been the result of other developments with respect to Christian schools. In the late 1970's and early 1980's, fundamentalist Christians challenged state requirements for basic approval of private schools on the basis of freedom of religion. In December, 1983, the U.S. District Court ruled, in *Bangor Baptist Church v. State of Maine Department of Education*, that the Maine Department of Education could not compel religious schools to seek state approval by threatening the parents of students in those schools under the state's compulsory attendance laws. (576 Federal Supplement 1299 (1983)). In effect, religious schools were given the option of deciding whether or not to seek state approval.

Subsequently, Maine state law was revised to state that only non-sectarian schools would be eligible to receive town tuitioned students. State law (sections 2901-2907) currently specifies the following conditions for "basic approval": (1) meeting standards of health, hygiene and safety; (2) complying with state law provisions governing immunizations, language of instruction, required courses and curricula, and certification of teachers; and (3) for secondary schools, complying with the law with respect to days and hours of instruction, safety of records, and student-teacher ratios. State law (sections 2951-2955) also provides additional conditions for "approval for tuition purposes",

including: (4) being a non-sectarian school in accordance with the First Amendment of the United States Constitution; (5) being legally incorporated; (6) complying with reporting and auditing procedures; and (7) for any school with 60% or more tuitioned students, participating in the Maine Educational Assessment (MEA) program.

The MEA provision has taken on increased significance with the publicity given to school scores on the Maine Educational Assessment in recent years. The MEA was part of the Maine Education Reform Act of 1984, and was first administered to students in 1985-86. It includes tests of six subjects: reading, writing, math, science, social studies and humanities. Ten of the 19 private schools that accept town tuitioned students enroll over 60% of their students in this way. Those private schools where students have been required to take the MEA and have done relatively well, most notably John Bapst, have sought to use these scores to attract additional students.

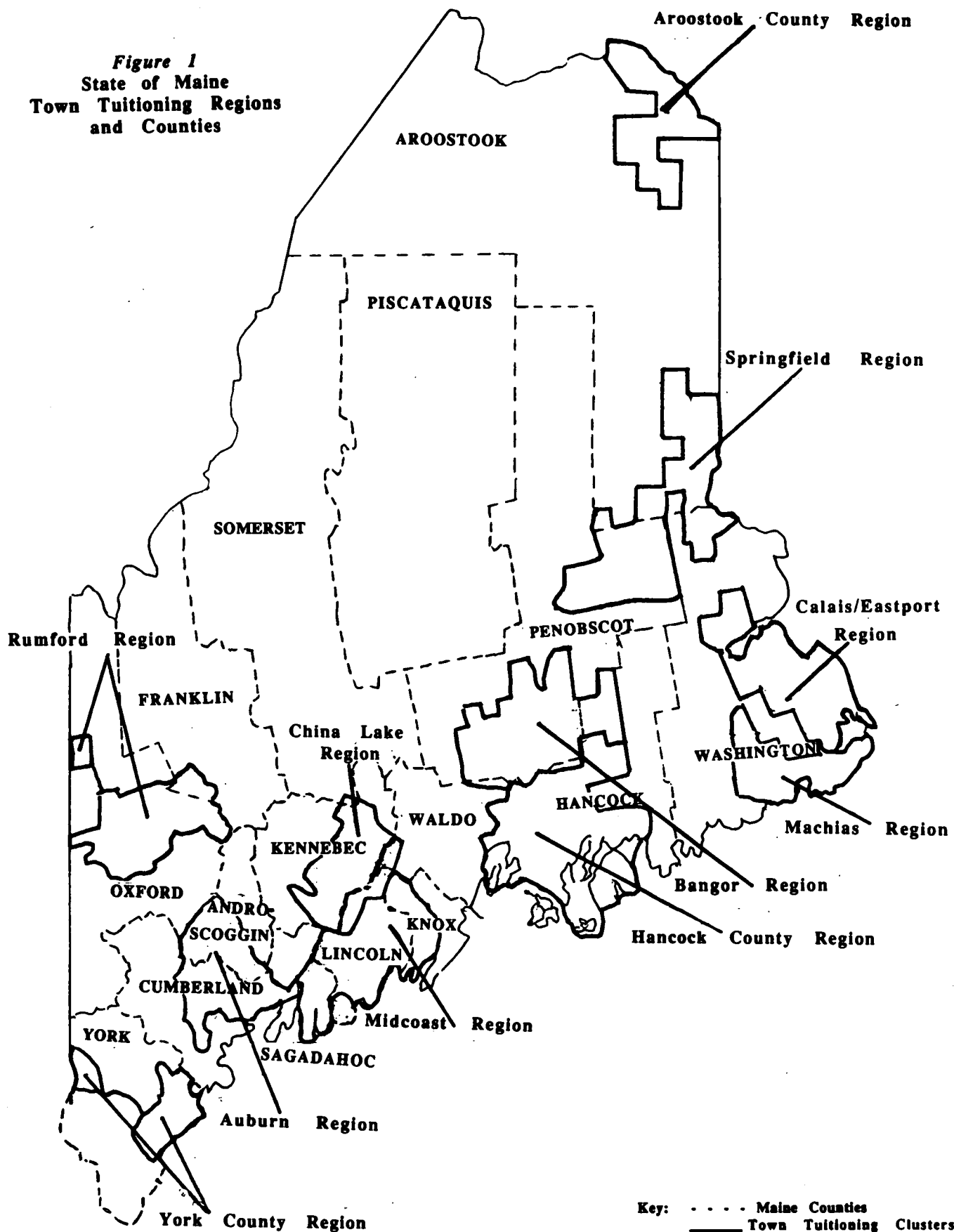
CURRENT TOWN TUITIONING ENROLLMENT PATTERNS

Town tuitioning in Maine and Vermont provides an interesting study in contrasts. John McClaughry, in his 36-page booklet *Educational Choice in Vermont* (1987), has summarized the extent of town tuitioning in Vermont as follows:

Of the 246 towns in Vermont, 95 have no public high school in the town, and do not belong to union high school districts.... these 95 tuition towns in 1984-85 paid tuition on behalf of 7633 secondary (9-12) pupils. Of these, 4312 (56.5%) attended public high schools in Vermont; 560 (7.3%) attended public high schools in adjacent states; and 2761 (36.2%) attended private schools and academies in Vermont and eight other states (including the Province of Quebec, Canada). The total of 7633 pupils from these tuition towns represented 24.2% of the total secondary school (grades 9-12) population of the state (31,525).

Maine is much larger than Vermont in both area and population, but the proportion of secondary school students who are town tuitioned is correspondingly smaller. In April, 1989, 9659 Maine secondary school students were town tuitioned, or about 15% of the total enrollment of 64,200 students (see Figure 1). Maine

Figure 1
State of Maine
Town Tuitioning Regions
and Counties



has 19 private schools that accept town tuitioned students, in comparison to 5 such schools in Vermont. Maine also has a higher percentage of town tuitioned students attending private schools within the state (42.2%).

On the other hand, only forty (40) Maine students (0.4%) are tuitioned to schools outside the state, most of them from towns along the coast far from Maine's border with New Hampshire. This suggests that these students are attending private boarding schools. In contrast, 560 Vermont students were tuitioned out-of-state to public schools alone. Other Vermont students are sent out-of-state to private schools, though it is impossible to determine how many of these students there are because McClaughry lumps them together with in-state private school students. The geographical proximity of more Vermont students to adjacent states may account for much of this difference.

In a recent book entitled *The Vermont Papers* (1989), McClaughry and co-author Frank Bryan note that "Educators may disapprove, but from all accounts parents love it [i.e. parental choice]. In some cases parents have chosen to move into a town simply because it gives them the right to choose their children's school." (p. 195) But they also speculate that parental choice has become popular in Vermont because of increasing centralization and state mandates, and suggest that a return to greater local control might result in decreased enthusiasm for educational choice. They propose a system of "shires" which they believe would enhance grassroots democracy, including local control of education.

In those Maine towns that tuition their secondary students and allow students and their parents to decide which schools they will attend, having a choice of high schools is also believed to be very popular with at least some town residents. For example, residents of the Airline Community School District, east of Bangor, were reported to be satisfied with tuitioning their high school students despite recent increases in tuition rates charged to the CSD. The *Bangor Daily News* (Higgins, 1989) quoted Airline CSD superintendent Robert Ervin as follows:

The issue of free choice in high schools is a very strong incentive to live in these communities. People like the idea of being able to choose where they are going to go to high school. They have a lot of options. So if the high school experience isn't good in one place, they can move to another. That's a fair luxury - a choice that kids in Ellsworth and Bangor don't have.

On what basis do tuitioned students (and their parents) decide which school to attend? Another *Bangor Daily News* article (Garland, 1989) describes the choices made by two high school students in the town of Orland.

Gary Hauger decided to go to George Stevens Academy in Blue Hill because he liked the school's reputation for academic training and music instruction. The 16-year-old junior from Orland plays the trumpet, and he hopes to be a lawyer some day.

His cousin, 14-year-old Samantha Robshaw of Orland, transferred from George Stevens after a few weeks to become a freshman at Bucksport High School this fall. The school better fits her personality, and many of her friends go there, she said. She also likes the cheering program in which she participates."

With respect to the issue of parental choice, the most important point of comparison between Maine and Vermont is that while many town tuitioned students in both states have a choice of schools, provisions in state law in both states allow towns to restrict the schools to which tuition will be paid. Some towns in each state have exercised these provisions.

In Maine, some towns which tuition their resident students require these students to attend particular schools by signing a contract with the receiving school. State law does not require contracts, nor does it specify the precise form that must be used, although it does spell out a few general guidelines regarding the contents of such contracts. Contracts must cover a period of time of from two to ten years and must be ratified by a majority vote of each of the governing bodies. State law also includes a formula for determining tuition rates, based on per pupil expenditures for preceding years. Contracts with private schools may include a joint committee, and are subject to approval by the commissioner. Otherwise, the parties to the contract are relatively free to include whatever provisions they wish. These contracts may provide for all students to be educated at a particular school, but they may also specify a minimum percentage of the town's students, allowing other students to go to other schools. In 1989-90, nineteen (19) towns and eight (8) SADs had written contracts with receiving school units or private schools on file in the Department of Education.

Towns may also limit which schools their resident students attend by offering bus transportation to only one school. Transportation to more than one school is

Table 2
Town Tuitioned Students by Region

Sending Units*			
	No. of Sending Units	Total Town Tuitioned Students	% Students Attending Receiving School Having Most Students From Their Sending Unit
Bangor	13	1472	71.60
Midcoast	16	1129	87.20
York Co.	4	1054	91.20
Auburn	6	866	73.70
China Lake	7	845	52.40
Hancock Co.	19	795	82.90
Calais/Eastport	16	372	84.40
Machias	9	332	93.40
Aroostook Co.	7	239	92.40
Springfield	8	198	89.80
Rumford	7	143	73.43
Region Subtotal	112	7445	-
Other Maine	74	2214	-
Out of State	0	0	-
TOTAL	186	9659	-

* "Sending Units" includes cities, towns, school administrative districts, plantations and unorganized territories

often inhibited by distance and by geography, especially in the midcoast region. In many cases (but not all), the cost and/or inconvenience of providing transportation is sufficient to discourage parents from considering other schools. Some towns, at the urging of groups of parents, have assumed the expense of providing bus transportation to two or more schools, which greatly increases the options available to students and their parents. Since parents may be actively involved in decisions regarding contracts and bus transportation made by school committees and town budget meetings, parental choice can be viewed as having a collective dimension as well as an individual one.

Of the 9659 secondary students in Maine who are town tuitioned, 7445 students live in geographic regions in which two or more high schools each receive town tuitioned students from two or more of the surrounding towns. Even in these regions, 14 towns and other local units have contracts binding most or all of their 1746 students to a single high school, leaving at most 5699 students who could be said to have some degree of choice. Furthermore, about 70% of the students who

have the possibility of exercising a choice attend the school most frequently chosen by other students from their own town, suggesting that the combination of community ties, geography and bus transportation is a powerful combination influencing the majority of decisions in those cases where choice is possible.

Geographically speaking, the largest numbers of town tuitioned students are found in the central, midcoast, southern and downeast sections of the state. Town tuitioning is most often found in smaller towns that are part of school unions (i.e. share a superintendent with other towns), although some smaller school administrative districts (SADs) also tuition their students to high schools. The school unit with the most students engaged in town tuitioning is the city of Saco, which contracts with Thornton Academy in that city.

An analysis of school enrollment reports for April 1, 1989 submitted to the Maine Department of Education resulted in the identification of eleven geographic clusters of school units with significant numbers of town tuitioned students at the secondary level. (See

Table 3
Town Tuitioned Students by Region

Receiving Units						
Public High Schools			Private High Schools			
	No. of Schools	No. of Town Tuitioned Students	% Town Tuitioned Students of Total Enrollment	No. of Schools	No. of Town Tuitioned Students	% Town Tuitioned Students of Total Enrollment
Bangor	6	1233	28.60	1	233	69.60
Midcoast	3	599	33.40	1	515	99.80
York Cnty.	3	228	10.50	2	824	83.83
Auburn	7	793	14.40	1	28	13.50
China Lake	5	415	11.00	2	383	89.90
Hancock Cnty.	5	506	25.40	1	308	99.30
Calais/Eastpt.	3	273	39.60	0	-	-
Machias	2	95	31.80	1	291	99.30
Aroostk. Cnty.	3	239	18.50	0	-	-
Springfield	3	55	7.91	1	243	100.00
Rumford	3	136	13.30	0	-	-
Reg. Sub.	43	4572	-	10	2825	-
Other Me.	29	974	-	9	1248	-
Out of State	-	-	-	?	40	-
TOTAL	72	5546	-	19+	4113	-

state map and Figure 1) The narrative summary which begins below presents eleven such geographic regions, in order of the total numbers of students tuitioned by sending units within each region, beginning with the largest (see Tables 2 & 3).

Bangor Region: The largest concentration of town tuitioned students on April 1, 1989 was in the Bangor region, where 1472 students residing in 11 towns and two small SADs were tuitioned into six public high schools and one private high school. A contract between SAD 23 and the Hermon School Committee limited 208 residents of the towns of Carmel and Levant to Hermon High School, but 1264 other students had some degree of choice among area high schools. If the extent to which students are dispersed among different schools can be taken as one measure of freedom to choose, then students from the town of Glenburn were the most active choosers in this region. Glenburn students were distributed among four high schools, with no more than 31.10% of the 209 students attending any one school. Over half (52.20%) of the students at Hermon High School are town tuitioned, as

are many of the students at Brewer (49.30%), Old Town (45.90%) and Orono (34.00%) High Schools. Over two thirds (69.60%) of the students at John Bapst High School are town tuitioned, and they come from ten of the thirteen sending towns in the region.

Midcoast Region: The second largest concentration of town tuitioned students is in the midcoast region. In all, 1129 students in this region are tuitioned into three public high schools and one private academy. Lincoln Academy alone receives 515 town tuitioned students, all but one of its total enrollment and nearly half of the town tuitioned students in this region. The rest attend Wiscasset, Bath and SAD 40, accounting for about a third of the students in those three schools. Sixteen towns in the region tuition students. Westport, which has a contract with Wiscasset, is the only one which sends all its students to a single high school. Thirteen (13) of the forty students statewide who were tuitioned to out of state schools reside in this region.

York County Region: York County has the third largest concentration of town tuitioned students: 1054.

Of these, 817 students from the City of Saco and the town of Dayton are tuitioned under contract into Thornton Academy. In addition, 175 students in Arundel may choose which high school to attend, most of them going to either Biddeford or SAD 71 (Kennebunk). Also, 66 students in the town of Acton choose between Wells-Ogunquit Community School District and South Berwick Academy.

Auburn Region: The Auburn region has 866 students tuitioned into 8 different high schools. Edward Little High School, in Auburn, enrolls 388 town tuitioned high school students, or 25.70% of its total enrollment. These students are tuitioned in from the towns of Poland, Mechanic Falls, Minot and Durham. Poland, Mechanic Falls and Minot each have contracts with Auburn allowing varying percentages of students to attend other schools. Some Poland students also attend SAD 15 and Hebron Academy, while most Durham students travel to Brunswick. Farther south, students residing in Raymond also have a range of options, with most attending high school in either Windham or Westbrook.

China Lake Region: The China Lake region east of the Kennebec River between Augusta and Waterville has the fifth largest concentration of town tuitioned students. All students in this region have options among various high schools. Seven towns in the China Lake region tuition 845 students, most of them into five public and two private high schools. Erskine Academy, a private school, drew the largest number of students from five of these towns, but in no town did as many as 80% of the students attend the same school. Of the 128 students from Whitefield, no more than 24.20% attended any one school, the greatest dispersal of a town's students of any town in the state. Overall, only 52.40% of the students in this region attended the school chosen by the largest proportion of their peers, the lowest such percentage for any of the eleven regions.

Hancock County Region: Along the coast in Hancock County, which includes Acadia National Park, 795 students are tuitioned from eleven towns, three SADs and several islands into five public high schools and one private academy. Nearly half (45.30%) of Ellsworth High School's students are tuitioned, as are nearly all of George Stevens Academy's students. In addition, nineteen students from this area attend boarding schools, thirteen of them out of state, all supported in part by town funds.

Calais/Eastport Region: In the Calais/Eastport region, on Maine's eastern border with Canada, 372

students from 16 sending units are town tuitioned. Among these students are 79 residents of the Passamaquoddy (Native American Indian) communities at Peter Dana Point and Pleasant Point, almost two-thirds (64.56%) of whom are boarding school students at Lee Academy and other private schools around the state.

Machias Region: Of the 592 high school students in the Machias region, almost two-thirds (65.20%) are town tuitioned, the great majority of them into Washington Academy under a contract with SAD 77. The Town of Pembroke in the Calais/Eastport region also has a contract with Washington Academy and buses its students there each day.

Aroostook County Region: In Aroostook County, 197 students are tuitioned into Caribou High School, most of them under contract from six smaller communities. At the northern tip of Maine, in the St. John River Valley on the Canadian border, 42 students in Grand Isle choose between the high schools of Madawaska and SAD 24.

Springfield Region: In the Springfield region, where Penobscot, Washington and Aroostock Counties come together, 198 students are town tuitioned, most of them into Lee Academy. Lee Academy also draws 100 town tuitioned students from elsewhere in the state, including 41 Passamaquoddy Indian students from the Calais/Eastport area.

Rumford Region: Seven towns in the vicinity of Rumford, in western Maine tuition 143 students into three public high schools.

In addition to these regional clusters, 974 students from 72 sending units (mostly sparsely populated towns, "plantations" and "unorganized territories" in relatively isolated northern sections of the state) are tuitioned into 29 public high schools, apparently without any choices available to them. The average number of students from these sending units is thus less than 14, although one of these towns tuitions 144 students to the neighboring town's high school. The average receiving high school enrolls about 33 town tuitioned students.

Also outside these regions, three school administrative districts tuition 1185 students into private academies in their largest towns (Dover-Foxcroft, Fryeburg and Pittsfield). Each of these private academies draws fewer than twenty tuitioned students from other school units. Two of the three also enroll private-paying students, many of them for a post-graduate year prior to admission into college. Sixty-three students statewide are tuitioned into six other

private schools that are not located in any of the regions described above and that enroll primarily private-paying students.

CONCLUSIONS

Most of the research to date on parental choice of school has focused on urban areas (Maddaus, 1990). Rural areas have been neglected, either because of the urban bias in educational research generally or, as Darling-Hammond and Kirby (1985) suggested, people in rural areas have been presumed to have few, if any, options. Researchers specializing in rural education have had conceptions of what the important questions were in their field which seem to have excluded research on parental choice (DeYoung, 1987). With the recent increase in state policies promoting inter-district choice, school choice will have an increasing impact on rural as well as urban education.

Of equal if not greater importance is the fact that a study of town tuitioning in rural areas can contribute to a better understanding of how school choice operates across a range of settings, urban and suburban as well as rural. Among the major questions which have not yet received definitive answers from research are the following:

(1) Given a choice, will most students and/or their parents choose the school with the better academic achievement, as measured by scores on standardized tests such as the Maine Educational Assessment (MEA)? (President Bush is basing his education reform strategy on the as yet unproven belief that they will!)

(2) Are private schools more effective than public schools? (Chubb and Moe (1990) have argued that they are, and that public policy ought therefore promote schools governed by markets rather than by politics).

(3) Do school choice plans benefit the poor and poorly educated, because they currently have the most limited options, or do they benefit the affluent and well educated, because they know how to make the system work to their advantage?

The preceding description of the extent of town tuitioning in Maine suggests that many students and their parents do have options regarding high school enrollment, although how aware people are of these options and what they do with the options available can not be determined without further study.

Notes: A team of researchers at the University of Maine is currently working on addressing the questions listed above. Our first step is an analysis of trends in town tuitioning enrollment in the years since the Maine Educational Assessment was introduced in 1985-86. Specifically, we are exploring the relationship between receiving high school scores on the MEA from 1985-86 to 1987-88 and subsequent enrollment trends for town tuitioned students. Of the 28 sending units examined so far, the hypothesized relationship between higher test scores and increased enrollment in receiving schools has been found in nine cases. Further research needs to be done to determine why the hypothesized relationship appears in some cases and not others, and also whether the statistical patterns consistent with the hypothesis are based on the predicted behavior or are a consequence of other, unrelated factors.

Maine's practice of town tuitioning offers an excellent opportunity to examine the complex issues of public vs. private education. Chubb and Moe (1990) argue that a crucial difference between public and private schools is that the former are subject to political and bureaucratic control, whereas the latter are relatively autonomous and driven by the demands of the marketplace. They use this analysis as a basis for arguing that public funds should be made available to private schools through school choice. The private and public schools of Maine that receive substantial public funds through town tuitioning offer a unique opportunity to explore the institutional effects of public funds received in this way.

Finally, like many rural areas, Maine has its share of impoverished households. It also has its minorities, most notably Native American Indians and French-speaking Acadians. Further research on town tuitioning in Maine will focus on whether children in low income and minority families benefit from the choices that are available to them, or whether they actually suffer as a consequence of the differences between their choices and those of the better educated and more affluent families in their areas.

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