

GOP unveils school voucher option

WASHINGTON (AP) - Congressional Republicans recently proposed a \$100 million plan to let poor children leave struggling schools and attend private schools at public expense.

The voucher idea is one in a series of social conservative issues meant to energize the Republican base as mid-term elections approach. In announcing their bills, House and Senate sponsors acknowledged that Congress likely won't even vote on the legislation this year.

Still, the move signals a

significant education fight to come. GOP lawmakers plan to try to work their voucher plan into the No Child Left Behind law when it is updated in 2007.

"Momentum is on our side," said Rep. Howard McKeon (R-Calif.), the chair of the House education committee.

The Bush administration requested the school-choice plan, but Tuesday's media event caused some awkwardness for the Education Department. The agency just released a study that raises

questions about whether private schools offer any advantage over public ones.

Under the new legislation, the vouchers would mainly go to students in poor schools that have failed to meet their progress goals for at least five straight years.

Parents could get \$4,000 per year to put toward private-school tuition or a public school outside their local district. They could also seek up to \$3,000 per year for extra tutoring.

Supporters say poor parents deserve choices, like

rich families have. When schools don't work, said Education Secretary Margaret Spellings, "parents must have other opportunities."

During Bush's presidency, Congress approved the first federal voucher program in the District of Columbia, and private-school aid for students displaced by Hurricane Katrina.

So far, Congress has refused to approve Bush's national voucher proposals. The new one is the first to target money for kids in schools that have fallen short under federal law.

Critics dismissed it as a gimmick.

"Voucher programs rob

public-school students of scarce resources," said Reg Weaver, president of the National Education Association, a teachers union. "No matter what politicians call them, vouchers threaten the basic right of every child to attend a quality public school."

Meanwhile, Spellings faced questions about her department's handling of a new study comparing students in public and private schools that had been quietly released on Friday.

The study found that, overall, private school students outperform public school children in reading and math.

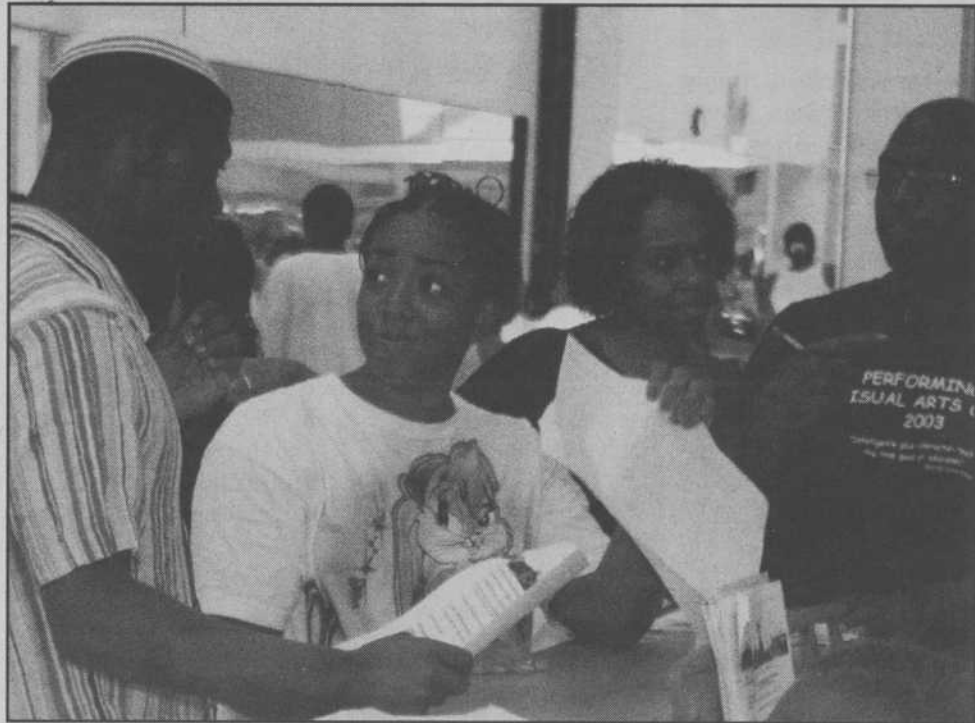
But public school students

often did as well, if not better, when compared to private-school peers with similar backgrounds.

The study had many caveats and warned that its own comparisons had "modest utility."

Spellings said she first learned about the study — one produced by the Education Department's research arm — by reading about it in the newspaper.

She said the agency must improve the way it releases such reports. But she rejected any suggestion that the department buried the study because it put public schools in a favorable light compared to private ones.



Sentinel-Voice photo by Ramon Savoy

Cirque du Soleil dancer Stephan Reynolds, left, gives Alita Requena of the Performing & Visual Arts Camp some advice about her dance routine.

Dancer

(Continued from Page 2)

where he works as an instructor at the City of Las Vegas, West Las Vegas Arts Center in the Historic Westside. He is one of the youngest among a team of highly experienced, professional performers with decades of professional experience.

"Upon my arrival to Las Vegas, my major concern was I needed to give back to the community. It took me two years to actually venture out and find West Las Vegas [Arts Center] and once I found PVAC, I wanted to know how to get involved in it."

"I teach various styles of dance, ballet, jazz, African etc. I'm eclectic enough to have learned and studied all the styles, and I am certified to teach all styles of dance."

Reynolds believes that the performing and visual arts can serve a greater purpose than simply being a fun activity. "I don't always like to say that we teach dance. We are teaching a way of life. We are using the arts as an incentive to give the kids a greater look on their future lives. It's a way to instill discipline. We give them an incentive by letting them know that if they do well here and learn accordingly, the outcome will be a good show. Children need incentives."

Reynolds teaches children about the history of dance in addition to actual movement. He began dancing at the age of two and started his professional dance career when he was accepted to a performing arts high school

in Minnesota.

He has since worked on Broadway, dancing in "Black Nativity," "Sarafina!" and "The Music Man." He has performed with the Alvin Ailey Dance Company, The Dance Theatre of Harlem, and the New York City Ballet.

"The best thing about my job is the passion. It's what I love doing," he said. "I have been blessed enough to do everything I have ever wanted to do."

Reynolds has big plans for his professional future, as well as the future of African-American dance in Las Vegas. He said he has owned a studio and wants to own another one eventually.

"I am in the process of starting my own dance company. I want to have a deeply rooted African-American Dance company here in Las Vegas. I want it to compete with Nevada Ballet Theatre."

Reynolds will be working with his PVAC students for their three-day, end-of-season series of performances next week.

"Children Out of the Box... Exploring Their Freedom" will be held on Tuesday, August 1 at 10:00 a.m. in the House of Blues at the Mandalay Bay, Thursday August 3 at 1:00 p.m. in the Clark County Library Theatre; and on Saturday, August 5 at 2:00 p.m. in the West Las Vegas Library Theatre. Admission is free to all of the performances.

Feds probe letter to NAACP

BALTIMORE (AP) -Threatening letters, at least two containing a white powdery substance, were sent to NAACP offices in three states, a spokesman for the organization said Monday.

The civil rights group's offices in Baltimore and New York City received letters with the powder, said spokesman Richard McIntire. The branch in Norfolk, Va., also received a letter, the FBI said, although it was not immediately determined whether the letter contained powder.

Marvin Cheatham, who heads the Baltimore office of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, said he opened the letter Friday and the substance later was identified as boric acid.

The substance found in New York had not been identified.

All three letters originated from Baton Rouge, La., said McIntire.

What the letters said was not immediately known. The FBI is investigating the letters as a hate crime.

GOOD WINS AGAIN.

Good Drivers Get Discounts Up To 40%.

Switch to State Farm* and your excellent driving record could help you save serious cash the day you sign up. It's just one reason more drivers choose State Farm than any other insurance company. So hurry and talk to an agent today and see what your great driving record can save you.

See your local Las Vegas area agent today.

LIKE A GOOD NEIGHBOR STATE FARM IS THERE.®

statefarm.com