

## Good Reasons Exist To Grant State Aid To Private Schools

*By Richard T. Hull*

Alan S. Chartock's piece on state aid to private schools, which appeared on the Viewpoints Page March 30, advances several poor arguments against State Sen. John Marchi's bill to extend tax credits and tax deductions to the parents of private and parochial schools.

Contrary to what Chartok suggests, the bill does not provide for any support by the state of private and parochial schools. It aims at providing relief for parents of children in those schools from a portion of the double burden they bear: tax support of public education and tuition support of private or parochial education. As it is now, they pay for their children's education twice.

Chartock predicts that private and parochial schools will raise their tuitions by corresponding amounts to channel the money "from the government" to them. This twisted logic first presumes that the money is being taken from government, whereas the bill proposes that the money not be sent to the government by the parent in the first place.

Second, it presumes that the parent is simply a conduit through which the money runs. But parents are consumers of a service; when the cost of that service exceeds their ability or willingness to pay, they shop elsewhere. Competition among private and parochial schools and direct accountability to parents — both lacking in the public sector — serve as an effective control over costs, and thus over the redistribution of these tax savings.

Private and parochial schools

cannot simply raise tuitions a corresponding amount. I would predict that tuition raises will proceed relatively unaffected by the tax reliefs proposed since they are determined by far more complex factors than the availability of some extra money in the parents' pockets.

The amount of deductions and tax credits involved in Sen. Marchi's bill is but a small portion of the total tuition cost borne by the parent. A \$20 credit would be offered to parents who take the standard deduction. And \$650 to \$1,000 of tuition could be claimed by those who itemize. Under proposed tax revisions, the top rate would be 9 percent. So, the maximum per-child in revenues lost to the state under the Marchi bill is \$90.

While it is the case that private and parochial schools are not required to conform to all of the standards that public schools do, it is not the case that they are not required to conform to standards which, in many cases, are more stringent than those for public schools. Private and parochial schools are generally required under their operating charters to undergo periodic evaluations; many utilize the same evaluators employed by public schools. (Our own school regularly undergoes evaluation by the Middle States Association, which routinely evaluates both public and private schools.) And, it has never been shown to be the case that teacher certification is the only way to foster competence in education. Indeed, very few teachers in the State University of New York system hold

certification at all.

Private school education often requires students to master greater amounts of material than do public school diploma requirements. Much has been made of the newly approved requirements for foreign language instruction to be imposed on students in new York State. Yet, foreign language study has been a requirement of our diploma for 27 years. We require three years each of science and mathematics in addition to the requirements for the Regents diploma; and we require the equivalent of 29 units of study, 11 more than is required by the state. Most other private and parochial schools impose requirements beyond those for public school diplomas. So, it is simply false to impute a dilution of standards to the Marchi bill.

Those who are swayed by opposition to the Marchi bill should consider whether they are prepared to abandon deductions for contributions

to churches, parochial and private schools, for that is part of the hidden agenda of those who urge this particular interpretation of the First Amendment separation of church and state. That amendment merely prohibits government from favoring one religion over another, and the Marchi bill would in no way involve such favoritism.

It behooves the state to foster, directly in some cases and indirectly in others, a plurality of our values. Those who avail themselves of private schools do so in spite of increased personal costs, often because of disappointment with the way public schools handle the education of their children. The Marchi bill provides a long-overdue recognition of the need of these parents for relief from an unfair burden

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