# Mayoral Leadership and Interest Group Politics: School Reform in Baltimore

## Structure of Government

Education politics in Baltimore is significantly influenced by the city's formal governmental structure. The city charter allows for a strong mayor-weak city council form of government. The mayor is the key figure in setting the city's budget and appoints the heads of various departments and many members of boards and commissions that govern city agencies. The mayor is also a central player in school affairs. Education is a department of city government operated by a board of school commissioners whose nine members are appointed by the mayor for terms of six years; three of the members' terms are staggered and end every two years. The city charter grants the school board the authority to appoint and remove at pleasure the Superintendent of Public Instruction; however, because the mayor appoints the school board, mayoral approval of the superintendent is always sought.

## The Public Schools

The Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPS) serve the residents of Baltimore City (the school district's boundaries are conterminous with the city). The BCPS has experienced significant changes in recent years; for example, enrollment has declined precipitously over the past two decades (from 193,000 in 1970 to 110,000 in 1977, a drop of 43 percent). Much of the decline can be attributed to a drop in white enrollment. On the eve of the historic 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision, 64 percent of the student population was white; four years later, in 1960, that dropped to 51 percent; by 1996, 82 percent of the students enrolled in the BCPS were African American. The city and its schools also became increasingly impoverished. In 1970, 14 percent of the families in Baltimore City lived below the poverty line; in 1980 the figure climbed to 19 percent and fell slightly to 18 percent in 1990. Predictably, the number of poor students attending the BCPS has grown: in 1993, nearly 68 percent of the students were eligible for reduced-price meals, an indication of their low-income status.

**The Staff of the BCPS**

The transition from white to black is also seen in the instructional and administrative personnel of the BCPS. As employment opportunities opened in the growing suburban school systems, many white teachers and administrators left. As a result, African Americans filled positions in the BCPS. By 1972, 59 percent of the teachers in the BCPS were African American; this percentage peaked in 1984 at 71 percent; and in 1993 leveled off to 63 percent. Since 1971, all permanent superintendents have been African Americans.[1] In 1993, a large majority of top administrators in the central office--deputy and assistant superintendents, directors, research specialists--were black, as were 73 percent of the principals in BCPS. Blacks were also heavily represented in lower-level positions--janitors, secretaries, teacher aides--throughout the school district.

**A Crisis in Education: The Challenges of an Urban School District**

Blacks became influential administrators in the BCPS just as the school district was falling apart. The *Baltimore 2000* report, a 1986 study commissioned by the local Goldseker Foundation to chart the city's future, observed: "In 1960, Baltimore's public schools, though overcrowded, were generally regarded as good. Some had quite distinguished records. By 1970 decline was well under way. . . . The system is now widely condemned as ineffective, undisciplined and dangerous."[2] Not much had changed as the BCPS entered the 1990s. In 1993, the dropout rate was more than three times the statewide average. The BCPS is also the poorest performing school system in Maryland on the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills and the California Achievement Test, and is well below the national and state averages on the Scholastic Aptitude Test. In 1993, only 32 percent of BCPS graduates completed the University of Maryland System requirements for entrance into its four-year colleges; the statewide figure was 46 percent. In addition to student

performance, a recent management report outlined the less visible challenges, such as incompetent school-based and central office administrators; a "culture" that does not support "effective management"; and "entrenched" attitudes among teachers and administrators that the BCPS cannot be improved.[3]

**Mayor Schaefer, Economic Development, and School Politics**

Obviously, the exodus of wealth and the dramatic increase in the proportion of poorer students enrolled in the BCPS account for some of the changes. However, information gathered from personal interviews, newspaper accounts, and other published reports points to other factors that have led to the crisis in public education in Baltimore.

Many respondents believe that a shift in the city's spending priorities, which came in 1971 when Democratic Mayor William Donald Schaefer was elected, contributed to the BCPS's decline. Downtown development became the hallmark of the Schaefer administration: the famous Inner Harbor redevelopment project, the World Trade Center, the National Aquarium, and luxury hotels were all constructed during his seventeen-year stay in city hall. Mayor Schaefer's tenure suggests that formal authority over education does not necessarily translate into progressive mayoral leadership in school affairs. From the start of his administration, Schaefer began to shift city government priorities away from providing services to residents to the pursuit of economic development projects as a way to stimulate growth in the city.[4] Many city agencies bore the burdens created by this strategy. Financial support for the BCPS was reduced; for example, between 1975 and 1985, the portion of the city budget going to schools decreased from 31.3 to 27.2 percent. Inadequate spending on the city's public schools had a significant effect on the quality of instruction,[5] as low teacher pay hampered the city's efforts to recruit high quality teachers.[6] As a result of low spending levels, the schools operated with a shortage of books and low staffing levels in libraries and counseling offices. Enrichment programs, such as art and music, were eliminated from the school budget.

Critics and supporters agree that Mayor Schaefer's handling of school issues reflected his governing style: he preferred quick, decisive action aimed at visible problems and tended to eschew more complex policy analysis. Moreover, as a city council member in the 1960s and 1970s, he had watched as previous mayors struggled with the challenges and racial controversies in the school system.[7] In Mayor Schaefer's opinion, the school system was a political land mine, and heavy involvement in school affairs offered few rewards. He typically left school policy (other than the budget) to trusted associates on the school board and African American administrators who owed their appointments to city hall. During the Schaefer era, the BCPS increasingly became viewed as an institution ripe for political patronage, and the true function of public education--mastery of sufficient knowledge and skills to assume the rights and responsibilities of citizenship--was lost. Even the diplomatic language of the *Baltimore 2000* report recognized that Schaefer did little to help the schools: "The mayor appoints the school board and can set its course. No substantial renovation of the school system can be accomplished without his deep interest, steady pressure, and willingness to apply the political weight of his office to insure results."[8] Future mayors, *Baltimore 2000* suggested, should play a more substantial role.

**A Bond of Personalism: Racial Politics and School Affairs**

Schaefer's authority over the school system played a key role in prolonging his hold on the mayor's office as Baltimore became a majority African American city. During his administrations Mayor Schaefer's black supporters were appointed as school administrators, principals, and other professional jobs in reward for their political support. During the 1970s and 1980s, an enduring alignment and relationship developed among African American professional educators, city hall, and the school system. Determined to bring calm to the BCPS, Schaefer and the white elites reached a "tacit" agreement with black leaders that consolidated African American

administrative control of the school system[9] and gave them control of key positions in the education arena.[10] The public school system now offered black professional educators control over substantial benefits in the form of jobs, fringe benefits, and various business and professional opportunities, which were severely limited prior to 1970.

In 1971, under pressure to reverse decades of discrimination and elevate African Americans to senior management positions, Roland Patterson was brought in to be the first black superintendent, making the school system the largest municipal institution under the direct administration of an African American. He was followed, in July 1975, by John L. Crew, also an African American, and succeeded in 1982 by Alice Pinderhughes (who retired in 1987 shortly after Schaefer was elected governor of Maryland). All subsequent school superintendents have been African Americans. Earlier research has shown a relationship between the appointment of African American school administrators and the hiring of African American teachers and other professional educators.[11] This is borne out in the BCPS's professional staff (teachers, counselors, librarians, principals, assistant principals, and central office administrators), which is dominated by African Americans. The Baltimore schools have been a patronage haven for decades and, during Schaefer's tenure, African Americans began to play a critical role in school patronage for the first time. As Wong described it:

> Increasingly, the school district resembled a patronage base. Personnel that orchestrated mayoral activities were put on the school system's payroll. Central office administrators critical of the administration were either demoted or transferred. Not infrequently school resources were allocated in a politicized manner to serve as warnings to dissenters at the school building level.[12]

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, Baltimore's top school administrators were a group of African Americans who had worked their way up the system's bureaucracy. As a close observer noted a few years ago, they are a group of colleagues and friends "who protect each other against the buffeting of the greater world, who find in the school headquarters building on North Avenue a refuge."[13] They have developed a personal affinity--a kind of personal bond. This *bond of personalism* did not begin--nor does it end--at the central administration or at the school site.[14]

The majority of the city's teachers and administrators share similar middle-class backgrounds. Many of Baltimore's black educators attended the same colleges and universities; many of them (such as Alice Pinderhughes, for example) graduated from Coppin State College or Morgan State University--two historically black institutions located in Baltimore. Many of them are members of the same fraternities and sororities; reportedly, when Alice Pinderhughes was superintendent, her sorority, Alpha Kappa Alpha, was well represented among the professional staff.[15] As one top administrator stated in a 1988 interview: "You've got to recognize a little bit of tradition in terms of blacks. Many of us went to black colleges and universities, and the social outlet there was the fraternities and sororities. That was the orientation for us."[16]

The bond of personalism is also strengthened by the fact that many teachers and administrators attend the same middle-class African American churches: Union Baptist Church and Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church are two of Baltimore's most prominent whose congregants include principals, teachers, administrators, and other school system personnel. They are also two of the most influential churches in city politics.[17] The various economic, political, and social linkages among black professional educators means that the school bureaucracy in Baltimore has an especially broad and powerful constituency upon which to draw.

Finally, it is important to note that the BCPS employs workers across the entire spectrum of class and occupation structure--teachers, administrators, teacher aides, librarians, counselors, coaches, clerical workers, painters, security officers, food workers, chauffeurs, cafeteria managers, and bus drivers--and African Americans comprise a super-majority of these workers. In other words, for many African Americans the BCPS has become a source for jobs and professional advancement. In an atmosphere of corporate mergers, downsizing, and economic restructuring, local political leaders cannot ignore the critical role the BCPS plays in Baltimore's economy.

**Crisis and Reform: Church Groups, Unions, and Business Leaders**

By the mid-1980s, it would have been appropriate to describe the BCPS as in a genuine crisis. The influential *Baltimore 2000* report asserted: "The fact remains that, on leaving the school system, very few Baltimore students have been pressed to the limit of their intellectual potential, many are unprepared for any but menial employment and some are unready for jobs of any kind." An adviser to the *Baltimore 2000* report added, "the system is simply a disaster."[18]

A heightened effort to reform the BCPS began in 1977 with the mobilization of a community-based organization called Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development (BUILD). By the early 1980s, it had accumulated a number of impressive victories and was beginning to become a player in Baltimore affairs. In 1983, BUILD began to investigate the shortages and disparities in supplies in the BCPS. It discovered that schools were short not only of paper products but also of textbooks, film projectors, typewriters, and an array of other basic resources. BUILD's findings heightened the concern among many black residents that something needed to be done to improve the city's schools. BUILD developed a plan to reform the BCPS, with site-based management (moving more decision-making authority from the central administration to the school site) and the creation of neighborhood school autonomy as key components.[19] BUILD leaders also recognized the important role the city's mayor played in school affairs, and criticized Mayor Schaefer for sacrificing the schools to the physical development of downtown.

The core of BUILD's membership is fifty churches, the majority of them predominantly African American congregations.[20] In addition to the churches, other powerful interests have sought ways of developing opportunities to influence the scope and nature of school reform in Baltimore. The hospital workers' union is a member. The Baltimore Teachers' Union (BTU) joined BUILD in the early 1980s; one of its former presidents asserted that the union became a

constituent member "to align ourselves with a group that had some power."[21] In fact, the union representing principals and administrators (Public School Administrators and Supervisors Association) also joined BUILD as a way of enhancing its influence in school reform and related matters.[22]

In the mid-1980s, alarmed by the *Baltimore 2000* report, Baltimore's corporate sector, represented by the Greater Baltimore Committee (GBC), became more active in school affairs. In 1982 the GBC studied the school system's management and in 1983 recommended "school-based budgeting."[23] In 1987, GBC joined with BUILD and formed the Baltimore Commonwealth, a school compact program, and continues to support the Collegebound Foundation. Over the past decade, the GBC has designated a staff person to work on local school concerns and act as liaison to the school community and in recent years has helped pay for the search for new superintendents. The GBC is customarily consulted whenever the school board moves to replace an incumbent superintendent and when it appoints a new one. It has testified before committees of the state legislature in support of increased state funding for Baltimore's schools. In 1994 the business community in conjunction with the BCPS formed a "management academy" for teaching principals to run schools like businesses.[24] The training program is designed to prepare principals for the procurement, budgeting, and other management responsibilities expected of them under school-based management.

**Kurt Schmoke: An Education Mayor**

The 1987 election of Mayor Kurt L. Schmoke consolidated school reform on the local agenda. Schmoke made education his top campaign issue and promised to make it his administration's priority. In his inaugural address, Schmoke vowed to make Baltimore "the city that reads." Many in the black church community, leading corporate and civic elites, and the BTU supported Schmoke's candidacy and looked to him for leadership in school affairs.

Schmoke used his appointive authority to put in place people he thought would serve his policy concerns. The appointment of his first school superintendent provides an illustration. Schmoke's vision for the schools included both decentralization and involving outside interests in educational policymaking in order to improve student performance. To accomplish these objectives, Schmoke rejected his school board's majority initial choice and asked its members to name Richard Hunter, an education professor who had served in Richmond, Virginia, and Dayton, Ohio, to replace the retiring Alice Pinderhughes. Hunter's tenure in Baltimore was tumultuous. He followed a long tradition among professional educators in being uncomfortable with outside involvement in school affairs. He failed to reach out to local stakeholders. Also, Schmoke and Hunter clashed publicly. In 1989, Schmoke ordered Hunter to approve a collaboration that allowed an inner-city school (the Barclay School) to adopt the curriculum of an elite, local private school (the Calvert School). The media coverage of the controversy embarrassed Hunter. In December 1990, citing Hunter's lukewarm support for decentralization, Schmoke asked the school board not to renew his contract.

In August 1991, the board named Walter G. Amprey to replace Hunter. A Baltimore native and a graduate of the city's schools and Morgan State University, Amprey started his career as an educator in the BCPS. In 1973, he moved to neighboring Baltimore County and eventually became a well-regarded associate superintendent. While working in the Baltimore County schools, Amprey maintained contact with school administrators, teachers, and black leaders in Baltimore City; in a sense, he arrived in his new job as both an insider and an outsider.

By the time Superintendent Amprey took over, Mayor Schmoke had become frustrated by the slow pace of change in the schools. Since his election in 1987, the BCPS had reformed very little. The city's school-based management proposal was being slowed and weakened by opposition from teachers and administrators who were successful in "capturing" and "eviscerating" several school governance reforms.[25] Veronica DiConti, in her study of the role

and influence of interests groups in school politics in Minnesota and Baltimore, argues that the teachers' union--with the support of BUILD--incorporated school-based management into union contract negotiations and eventually stacked the process in favor of the teachers:

> Teachers had definite strong opinions about the direction School-Based Management in Baltimore City should take. In particular they wanted resources distributed from the central administration to the schools and the teachers themselves. Their proposal, originally introduced as a way to increase parental and neighborhood involvement, evolved into a device for increasing the authority of teachers in relation to the central administration of the schools.[26]

The teachers' union also played a role in delaying the Barclay-Calvert collaboration. The BTU took the position that adopting the new curriculum would increase teachers' responsibilities at Barclay. The union opposed the collaboration although Barclay's parents and teachers (union members) supported the proposal. It took the intervention of Mayor Schmoke to get the proposal adopted.

In 1992, Baltimore gained national attention when school officials, with Mayor Schmoke's support, hired a private firm, Educational Alternatives, Inc. (EAI), to operate nine (eight elementary schools and one middle school) of its public schools. Mayor Schmoke believed that EAI could show that public personnel, using private management techniques, could improve performance and the quality of education in the BCPS. Schmoke also saw EAI as way around the teachers' union and school bureaucracy who were finding ways to "slow down" and "choke" efforts to decentralize the schools. Finally, Schmoke viewed private management of the nine schools as consistent with his goal of giving schools more autonomy so that decision making would be at the school site:

> Baltimore's privatization initiatives are in keeping with this overall strategy of liberating schools from what is often an unwieldy and unresponsive central bureaucracy. By signing a five-year contract with Education Alternatives, Inc., we literally cut off nine schools from the central bureaucratic hub, and put them under private management. While this was a controversial move, we felt that we had to jump start the emancipation process, particularly given the increasing resistance to change.[27]

**EAI: Private Management of Public Schools**

EAI is the brainchild of its chief executive officer, John Golle.[28] A prosperous business executive, Golle founded EAI in 1986 after more than twenty years as a salesman. Prior to the Baltimore contract, EAI ran two private schools in Minnesota and Arizona and one public school in Miami. EAI's trademark instructional model, known as the "Tesseract" method, relies on a second adult in the each classroom to intensify teaching and lower student-teacher ratios, the use of computers and other technology, individual education plans for each student, and heavy parental involvement. Each student is tested and an individual "personal education plan" is devised for the student, developed with input from the child's parents or legal guardians. EAI also provides facility maintenance services and managerial and financial expertise to the management of the nine schools.

EAI officials promised to improved student performance, and make a profit, with no more money than the school system spent per pupil and by using the existing teachers and staff. Under the terms of the Baltimore contract the school system retained authority over the assignment of all professional staff and EAI could "recommend" assignments and transfers and set final staffing levels. Paraprofessionals--namely, teacher aides--could be hired by EAI. The five-year contract could be terminated at any time with ninety days' notice.

**The Politics of Contracting Out in Baltimore**

When the contract was announced, a number of Baltimore's civic and political leaders praised the decision. The editors of the *Sun* opined that Mayor Schmoke, the school board, and the city's new school superintendent "should be applauded for being willing to try this new approach."[29] Business leaders, who had long advocated implementing private management techniques in the operation of the schools, liked the idea of having a business firm operating public schools. Although soon to turn hostile, the BTU had been impressed by EAI's record in Miami. The BTU president appeared in public session before the school board to endorse the contract.[30]

The Tesseract schools underwent extensive renovations: the buildings were painted, new carpeting was installed, broken window panes were replaced, leaky faucets were fixed, broken toilets repaired, and rubble-strewn school yards were cleaned and landscaped. Teachers and principals in the schools were pleased with the additional resources EAI provided: bright new tables and chairs in each classroom, a telephone on each teacher's desk, and a working copier in each school. Students and parents were excited about the new computers--four in each classroom and a new computer lab in each school. Initial reports showed that students' attendance increased.[31]

Things quickly turned sour, however, when one of the school system's most powerful constituents, the teachers' union, withdrew its support. After EAI transferred ninety teacher aides from the Tesseract schools and replaced them with less experienced, and less costly, recent college graduates, the BTU launched an aggressive campaign to kill the experiment. The BTU questioned the wisdom of replacing experienced teacher aides--people who lived near the schools and were among the few who held jobs in those neighborhoods--in favor of college "interns" who were willing to work for less money and no health benefits. EAI officials argued that the interns, all of whom were college graduates, were better qualified than the BTU's teacher aides. This episode--combined with EAI's earlier decision to reassign union custodians from the nine schools and replace them with nonunion janitors--convinced BTU's leaders that EAI's strategy was to save money and make a profit by replacing relatively expensive union personnel with less costly nonunion personnel. It also heightened the BTU's concern about the long-term job security of its membership.

In response, the BTU boycotted EAI's teacher-training sessions.[32] The BTU filed a lawsuit claiming that the contractual agreement with EAI violated the city charter in that it was approved without competitive bidding and without consideration of the city's minority set-aside provisions. The American Federation of Teachers (AFT), BTU's parent organization, asked the federal government to investigate the impact of privatization on public schools. BTU called for superintendent Amprey's resignation and organized a protest march on school headquarters.

BUILD, which in 1983 helped mobilize community support for school reform and worked closely with Mayor Schmoke on several policy issues, also took a strong stance against the EAI experiment. BUILD's leaders claimed to have been left out of the decision-making process. "The mayor has not really consulted with us," one BUILD member told reporters.[33] The day before the vote to approve the EAI contract, Schmoke attended a meeting, which drew over 450 BUILD volunteers, at which BUILD leaders argued against turning to the private sector to rescue the public sector. To "turn to the market sector to bail out the public sector is dangerous," asserted an influential BUILD organizer.[34] BUILD asserted that EAI's major concern was not schooling but generating a profit; a BUILD leader told the mayor, "We will fight you on this because the whole thing is contrary to public education."[35]

The Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance (IMA), an organization representing about 160 black ministers, complained that city officials failed to consult with them before announcing plans to hire EAI. The IMA joined with BUILD and the unions to stop EAI.

Finally political opponents of Mayor Schmoke joined the chorus of opposition. Mary Pat Clarke, then president of the city council and later an unsuccessful challenger to Schmoke in the 1995 mayoral election, was a vocal opponent of EAI. As a member of the Board of Estimates, Clarke voted against the EAI contract. Other city council members also criticized the experiment and eventually voted to urge Mayor Schmoke to delay any expansion of EAI's role before an independent evaluation of the experiment was completed.[36]

Supporters of EAI maintained that BTU bitterly opposed Tesseract because the EAI contract threatened union bargaining power; that BUILD opposed Tesseract because many of the influential and active parishioners in its member churches were teachers (BTU is a constituent member of BUILD); and that Mary Pat Clarke and other city politicians opposed the program because it pandered to the ministers, community groups, and city employee unions. In short, many of the opponents of EAI were politically connected, vocal, and deeply entrenched.

**The Demise of EAI**

The first set of standardized test scores, released in 1994, showed that the Tesseract experiment failed to significantly improve student performance in the two years since EAI began managing the schools.[37] Student performance on standardized test results provided further ammunition for opponents of Tesseract. Superintendent Amprey argued that test scores alone should not determine whether the experiment was a success or failure. However, heavy resistance from teachers, some parents, and the city council forced Amprey to announce that no further expansion of EAI would occur without a comprehensive evaluation. Moreover, preliminary financial analysis showed that, despite EAI's initial claims, the Tesseract schools were receiving more money per pupil than the other schools in the system.[38]

The initial test scores intensified critics' opposition and led the BTU to call for an immediate end to the contract. City Council President Clark, who was campaigning to unseat Mayor Schmoke, increased her opposition to EAI. With an election year looming, Schmoke was forced to announce that EAI's fate depended primarily on student test scores and the results of an independent evaluation.

In August 1995, the first outside evaluation of the EAI experiment was completed. The report, conducted by the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, found that the Tesseract schools showed little difference from comparable city-run schools on test results, attendance, parent involvement, or even cleanliness.[39] Three years into the experiment, the evaluation found that student scores on the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills were about the same as in 1992, the year of EAI's arrival, for the Tesseract schools, the control schools, and the city as a whole. Significantly, the evaluation found that Baltimore city was spending about 11 percent more (approximately $628) per student in the Tesseract schools than in comparison schools.

EAI's management of the Tesseract schools ended on March 4, 1996, a year and three months short of the original five-year contract. In announcing the end of the experiment, Mayor Schmoke and Superintendent Amprey pointed to the researchers' financial information. The report asserted that "the promise that EAI could improve instruction without spending more than

Baltimore City was spending on schools has been discredited."[40] In actuality, the contract termination came after Mayor Schmoke and John Golle failed to come to an agreement on a renegotiated contract. Schmoke offered to continue the contract "at a rate 16 percent less than EAI was projected to receive under the average per-pupil cost formula."[41] Golle refused. Mayor Schmoke maintained that the city, facing a budget deficit, could not afford to keep EAI. Superintendent Amprey told reporters, "We have only so many dollars."[42]

**Conclusions**

In a seminal article, Robert Salisbury [43] argued that a mayor should "play a major role in giving over-all program and fiscal direction" to public education. The Baltimore experience suggests that it is not that simple. Mayor Schaefer did not use his formal authority over the school system to institute progressive reforms. However, the experience of Mayor Schmoke suggests that a visible public official can consolidate and maintain an important policy issue on the local agenda. School reform is on the agenda in Baltimore because it is one of Mayor Schmoke's top priorities.

Mayor Schmoke, however, operates within a particular context. As an elected official, he has to be attuned to the concerns of BUILD and other school interests. Take, for example, Schmoke's behavior in the EAI experiment. He hired EAI after the BTU and BUILD frustrated his efforts to institute site-based management. Yet, the vocal opposition of teachers and their allies in the black church community during a heated re-election campaign forced Schmoke to stop the experiment. Although citing financial concerns in terminating EAI's contract, the political opposition from BTU and BUILD was a decisive factor as well. Even a mayor who is genuinely dedicated to education can be restrained by political factors.

Professional educators play an important political, social, and economic role in Baltimore. They tend to be active in political parties and campaigns, to have leadership roles in local civic associations, and to be prominent members in major church congregations. Black

teachers and administrators also have powerful allies: African American ministers. Few big-city mayors are willing to challenge such a powerful coalition.

Baltimore's experiment with EAI illustrates how critical concerns about jobs and job security play in big-city school affairs. As the city's largest employer, the BCPS is a source of thousands of jobs. In Baltimore's declining economy, this is no small matter. In her comparative study of teachers' unions and contract provisions in six suburban, rural, and urban school districts, Susan Johnson argues that union contract provisions tied to job security were enforced more stringently in urban districts where the local economy was in decline: "The expansion or decline of enrollments and the local economy seemed to influence the progress of negotiations and the prominence of the contract. Where there were fewer students and fewer dollars to divide among all local employees, negotiations became more strained and contract provisions tied to job security were enforced more stringently district-wide."[44]

In big cities with declining economies, such as Baltimore, and where displaced school workers cannot easily take jobs outside of education, union leaders and their allies can be expected to oppose initiatives perceived to threaten job security. The reaction of the teachers' union and their allies to EAI's decision to transfer union-affiliated teacher aides and custodians illustrates BCPS' significance to the local economy. Their opposition crystallized long *before* any evaluation of EAI's capacity to improve student performance.

In 1993, I interviewed several African American ministers, many of them active in BUILD and the IMA, and attempted to discern their concerns about Tesseract and the reasoning behind their opposition. Those interviews revealed that the perception that some educators could lose their jobs concerned many church leaders. One BUILD leader stated:

> The fact is that many of our major attractions--civic center, convention center, the Baltimore Arena, etc., operate with employees who are not city employees. Employees now are temporary or part-time, or employees of a contract company. It destroys some of the employment base of the city. Of course, because Tesseract is a move toward privatization of the school system, and as more schools are turned over to Tesseract, Tesseract then has the authority to hire and fire, to reallocate, to reassign employees at

> will, and that's very threatening to a person. That's their livelihood in the school system.[45]

Later, I tried to gauge the extent to which the concern about the job security of black educators might compete with the concern of improving education for the city's children. When I asked the same minister what would be BUILD's position if a reputable, independent evaluation found that EAI significantly improved student performance in the nine schools, he responded: "We'd still be leery of the privatization of a traditional government function."[46] Many other black ministers responded similarly.

One cannot understand the politics of school reform in Baltimore without first understanding the important, and sometimes defining, role the school system plays in the city's economy. The school system is the largest employer in Baltimore and a large sector of the black community is on its payroll. Wilbur Rich's observation about school politics in Detroit, Gary, and Newark can be applied to Baltimore: "The school pie feeds many families, and slicing it is a major event within the local economy."[47] For many teachers, administrators, and other school system employees, concerns about improving education for children may coexist and even compete with concerns about the viability of the school system as a source of wages, professional development, and economic advancement.

For the people who work in the schools, this is "their" system. Any criticism from those "outside" the schools is looked upon with suspicion and has the effect of strengthening the bond of personalism that exists among the thousands of administrators, teaches, and other system employees. As one top administrator stated: "What bothers me is that there are a lot of people outside the schools who believe they can run the schools better than the professionals. We are always criticized for what we don't do. People ought to give us credit for having some ability and some skills."[48]

Beneath the surface of the opposition to EAI was also a concern that EAI meant a shift in racial control of the schools. Although Mayor Schmoke and Superintendent Amprey did not face the vocal opposition from African American residents that Washington, D.C., Superintendent

Franklin Smith faced when he sought to promote EAI management of fifteen Washington schools, racial concerns were not absent from the Baltimore case. That the head of EAI was a white businessman was not lost on many black educators and the larger African American community.[49]

Public choice theorists, conservative analysts, and others have emphasized the role that the public school bureaucracy can play in blocking school reform.[50] The Baltimore case, however, shows that historical and contemporary forces make race an important part of this story that often goes untold. Because racism impeded their ability to penetrate stable and lucrative occupations in commercial and industrial organizations, African Americans have depended disproportionately on public sector employment. In Baltimore, the school district plays a vital role in the African American community. The fact that African Americans occupy important positions in the decision-making apparatus and in political life, and that a majority of the administrators, teachers, other school systems employees, and students are African American, gives school reform a particularly racial dimension.

## Endnotes

[1]Edward Andrews, a white administrator from Montgomery County, served as acting superintendent from 1990 to 1991.

[2]Peter Szanton, *Baltimore 2000: A Choice of Futures* (Baltimore: Morris Goldseker Foundation, 1986), p. 10.

[3]Associate Black Charities, *A Report of the Management Study of the Baltimore City Public Schools* (Baltimore, 1992), p. I-5.

[4]Marc V. Levine, "Downtown Redevelopment as an Urban Growth Strategy: A Critical Appraisal of the Baltimore Renaissance," *Journal of Urban Affairs*, Vol. 9, no.2, pp. 103-23, 1987.

[5]Mayor Schaefer and his supporters were quick to point out that the state government failed to adequately support the city's schools, which enrolled the highest proportion of disadvantaged students of Maryland's twenty-four school districts. In the 1984-85 school year, for example, Baltimore spent a total of $3,100 per student. Baltimore County spent $4,300, and Montgomery County $4,900. The state's average was $3,670. In 1979, the city sued the state in an effort to revamp Maryland's local school aid formulas and increase funding for Baltimore. The city lost the suit, but the legislature subsequently adopted a new funding formula that brought more state funds to the city's schools. The disparities, however, persist today. See Robert E. Slavin, "Funding Inequities Among Maryland School Districts: What Do They Mean in Practice?" (Unpublished paper, Center for Research on Effective Schooling for Disadvantaged Students, 1991); and The Abell Foundation, "A Growing Inequality: A Report on the Financial Condition of the Baltimore City Public Schools" (Baltimore: The Abell Foundation, 1989).

[6]Slavin, "Funding Inequities," pp. 11-18.

[7]Mike Bowler, "Lessons of Change: Baltimore Schools in the Modern Era," Report commissioned by the Fund for Educational Excellence, 1991.

[8]Szanton, *Baltimore 2000*, p. 41.

[9]This type of "distributional" arrangement is familiar to students of American urban politics. Steve Erie's study of the Irish political machines discussed how machine bosses extended their longevity by distributing a variety of public sector jobs to their fellow Irishmen who typically got police and fire jobs, teaching jobs went to the Jews, and the Italians received positions in sanitation. See Steve Erie, *Rainbow's End: Irish-Americans and the Dilemmas of*

*Urban Machine Politics, 1840-1985* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988). In my interviews with key civic leaders, top educational administrators, business executives, and other school activists, white leaders were quick to refute the existence of such a "tacit" agreement. On the other hand, black educators and other black leaders acknowledged that such an agreement was made.

[10]To be sure, this arrangement was fueled in part by research showing that white middle-class teachers and administrators often had low expectations for minority youth, and that these low expectations themselves helped to cause poorer performance. Moreover, as the student enrollment in city schools grew increasingly African American, the desire grew for superintendents and other administrators who represented this population and could be role models for it. See Barbara L. Jackson, *Balancing Act: The Political Role of the Urban School Superintendent* (Washington, D.C.: The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, 1996).

[11]Kenneth J. Meier, Joseph Stewart Jr., and Robert E. England, *Race, Class, and Education: The Politics of Second-Generation Discrimination* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989).

[12]Kenneth K. Wong, *City Choices* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), p. 115.

[13]Will Englund, "Tightly knit group of survivors controls power," *Sun*, 3 May 1988, p. 1A.

[14]I borrowed the term "bond of personalism" from Alan Rosenthal, *Pedagogues and Power: Teacher Groups in School Politics* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1969).

[15]Englund, "Tightly knit group."

[16]Ibid.

[17]See Harold McDougall, *Black Baltimore: A Theory of Community* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), pp. 123-26; and Eugenia Collier, "House Built on Rock: Union Baptist Church," *Negro History Bulletin* 47, no. 4 (October-December 1984), pp. 3-7. The pastor of Bethel AME, Dr. Frank M. Reid, is Kurt Schmoke's stepbrother.

[18]Szanton, *Baltimore 2000*, p. 10.

[19]See Harry Boyte, *Commonwealth* (New York: The Free Press, 1989), p. 123.

[20]Harold McDougall, *Black Baltimore* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990); and Marion Orr, "Urban Regimes and Human Capital Policies," *Journal of Urban Affairs* 14 (June 1992), pp. 173-87.

[21]Quoted in Veronica DiConti, *Interest Groups and Education Reform* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of

America, 1996) p. 143.

[22]Ibid.

[23]Bowler, *Lessons of Change,* p. 37.

[24]Lawrence E. Leak, Wesley O. Petersen, and Lyle R. Patzkowsky, "Developing Leaders for Urban Schools: The Baltimore Experience," *Urban Education* 31 (January 1995), pp. 510-28.

[25]DiConti, *Interest Groups and Education Reform,* p. 155.

[26]Ibid., pp. 156-57.

[27]Remarks by Mayor Kurt L. Schmoke, American Federation of Teachers Quest Conference, Washington, D.C., July 9, 1993, p. 4

[28]For a thorough discussion of EAI, its corporate structure, investors, and background on John Golle, see Craig E. Richards, Rima Shore, and Max B. Sawicky, *Risky Business: Private Management of Public Schools* (Washington, D.C.: Economic Policy Institute, 1996).

[29]Editorial, "Schools in Another Dimension." *Sun*, 11 June 11 1992, p. A12.

[30]Galerah Asayesh, "Baltimore board weighs private school operation." *Sun,* 17 May 1991.

[31]Mark Bumster, "Nine schools start to mend." *Sun*, 15 November 1992, p. B1.

[32]Mayor Schmoke eventually stepped in to negotiate an agreement that left some aides in the nine schools (some EAI classrooms now had three aides) and found jobs for the rest elsewhere in the school system.

[33]Mark Bomster, "Schmoke facing challenge tonight on school reform," *Sun,* 20 July 1992, p. B1.

[34]Ibid.

[35]Ibid.

[36]Gary Gately, "Council members call for a delay on EAI expansion." *Sun,* 26 May 1994, p. A1.

[37]Gary Gately and JoAnna Daemmrich, "EAI fails to improve elementary school scores." *Sun,* 17 June 1994, p. A1.

[38]For a detailed analysis of spending in the Tesseract schools see, Roberts et al., *Risky Business*, pp. 79-124.

[39]Lois C. Williams and Lawrence E. Leak, *The UMBC Evaluation of the Tesseract Program in Baltimore City* (Baltimore: Center for Educational Research, University of Maryland Baltimore County, 1995).

[40]Ibid., p. 115.

[41]Lois C. Williams and Lawrence E. Leak, "School Privatization's First Big Test: EAI in Baltimore." *Educational Leadership* 24, no. 2 (October), 1996, p. 57.

[42]Jean Thompson, "City school board ends effort to privatize." *Sun*, 1 December 1995, p. A1.

[43]Robert Salisbury, "Schools and Politics in the Big City." *Harvard Educational Review* 37 (Summer 1967), p. 409.

[44]Susan Moore Johnson, *Teacher Unions in Schools* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), p. 168.

[45]Interview with minister active in BUILD, September 29, 1993.

[46]Ibid.

[47]Wilbur C. Rich, *Black Mayors and School Politics: The Failure of School Reform in Detroit, Gary, and Newark* (New York: Garland Publishers, 1996), p. 5

[48]Will Englund, "Huge bureaucracy drifts without a plan." *Sun*, 1 May 1988, p. 1A.

[49]In fact, in 1995, as opposition to Tesseract intensified, EAI hired two African American executives from the Xerox Corporation and gave them visible roles in the Baltimore experiment.

[50]John E. Chubb and Terry M. Moe, *Politics, Markets, and America's Schools* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1990).