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Community Voice or Captive of the Right?

The Black Alliance for Educational Options



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In December 2001, People For the American Way Foundation examined the short history of a new group called the Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO). BAEO seemed to come out of nowhere with a series of compelling television ads featuring African-American parents talking about the importance of school choice to them and their children. Behind the advertising was a handful of wealthy right-wing foundations and individuals who have funded the school voucher movement for decades.

Less than two years later, the money keeps coming in to BAEO, but the substance has not changed. BAEO has established itself as one of the top promoters of the right-wing's school voucher agenda, even landing a grant from the U.S. Department of Education to promote the White House's education initiatives.

This updated report provides an overview of BAEO's place in the voucher movement, examining its promotion of vouchers, the affiliations of its leaders and board of directors, and the history of its funders. People For the American Way and People For the American Way Foundation have produced other reports analyzing existing voucher programs and documenting their failure to address the needs of low-income children.

BAEO's Founding: Image and Strategy

With the voucher legislation and ballot initiatives of the 1980s failing, voucher proponents embraced a new strategy – adopting the language of the civil rights movement and targeting the African American community. This political strategy is designed to boost support for vouchers, not only among African Americans, but also among progressive and moderate suburban whites, many of whom support strong public schools. The current public relations and legislative focus on poor children does not alter right-wing voucher proponents' long-term goal of broader-based voucher systems and privatization that would irreparably harm public education.

BAEO announced its formation on August 24, 2000 at a national press conference in Washington, D.C. Former Milwaukee Schools Superintendent Dr. Howard Fuller, the

[†] An extensive collection of research by PFAW and PFAWF on vouchers is available at: http://www.pfaw.org/issues/education/vouchers/

group's president and founder, said it would support tax-funded voucher programs, private scholarships, tuition tax credits, charter schools and public/private partnerships.

Almost immediately after formation, BAEO began running print ads in several national newspapers, including the *Washington Post*, *Washington Times*, and *New York Times*, and over a dozen community newspapers with predominantly black readership. The ads feature young African American students and their parents repeating BAEO's mantra, "Parental school choice is widespread – unless you're poor." Designed to put a new face on what has traditionally been a largely white Republican movement, the ads' objective, Fuller explained, "is to change the face of [the voucher] movement."²

The ad campaign expanded after the November 2000 election to include television and radio spots in the Washington, D.C. area in what BAEO organizers described as a targeted attempt to influence key opinion-makers, like lawmakers and journalists. Kaleem Caire, BAEO's then-executive director, explained the ad campaign strategy in a *Family News in Focus* article, saying, "[Washington, D.C.] has the most opinion leaders in the country – and it's out there where we felt that the message needed to be sent first."³

A second blitz of television ads touting the benefits of voucher programs in Milwaukee, Cleveland and Florida ran from April through June 2001. "Anybody who watches TV in Washington, D.C.," Jim Manley, press secretary for Senator Ted Kennedy told *USA Today*, "is going to stumble across these ads." In addition to Washington, D.C. and national newspapers, the campaign targeted 30 newspapers and 35 radio stations in Wisconsin, where the fight over vouchers is a constant part of the political landscape. ⁵

The extent of BAEO ad spending was the source of some speculation. The group announced it was beginning operations with a \$900,000 budget in August 2000 and reported spending \$1.3 million on the November 2000 ads. However, given BAEO's aggressive advertising in expensive media markets, their total ad spending was likely far higher. By July 2001, the *Christian Science Monitor* reported that some estimated BAEO's ad buys were worth as much as \$3 million⁶ – a handsome feat considering the group was only a year old at the time.

According to a June 2003 study, BAEO's spending on advocacy ads was at least as high as those early estimates. The Annenberg Public Policy Center found that BAEO's 2001 print and television ads in the Washington D.C. market alone cost \$4.33 million. This spending for one year made BAEO the fourth-largest spender during the entire 2001-02 time period studied, ranking it above the AARP and Lockheed Martin.

The Annenberg study also found that BAEO's ads accounted for 89% of the total provoucher spending. Furthermore, pro-voucher ads targeting Washington D.C. totaled \$4.9 million, while comparable anti-voucher spending came to only \$870,000.

Expanding the PR Machine

Like the school voucher movement as a whole, BAEO sought to create a presence in cities around the country considered to be important voucher battlegrounds. The new group had quick expansion plans – and deep pockets to back them up.

In March 2001, BAEO began its organizing efforts with its first annual meeting in Milwaukee – bringing over 600 African-American voucher backers from 35 states together for the express purpose of starting local chapters. By May, chapters were operating in Milwaukee, New York, Denver, Indianapolis and Philadelphia and the group claimed to be organizing chapters in nine other cities. Two months later, BAEO announced the formation of a new chapter in St. Louis, which immediately announced plans to start running ads. One of the Indianapolis chapter's first activities was to host a conference with the prominent African American voucher supporter Rev. Floyd Flake as the keynote speaker. By the summer of 2002, BAEO had tapped into the network of existing local African-American voucher supporters and formed 33 local chapters.

BAEO quickly converted the new activists into spokespeople, amplifying its press coverage. BAEO spokespeople were quoted widely in national education stories such as the Supreme Court's hearing of the Cleveland voucher case and on the debate over President Bush's voucher proposals. BAEO joined the roster of pro-voucher press conferences and briefings, often teaming up with representatives from pro-voucher partisans like the Cato Institute and controversial researcher Paul Peterson.¹⁴

With voucher supporters firmly in control of education policy in the White House, BAEO also networked with policymakers like Education Secretary Rod Paige. In June 2002, both Howard Fuller and BAEO president Lawrence Patrick spoke at an Education Department conference titled: "Gaining Momentum for Choice: Celebrating the Next Decade of Charter Schools in America." In January 2003, Kaleem Caire – who had just moved from BAEO to the closely-related American Education Reform Council [see pp. 6-7] – was named to the Education Department's Independent Review Panel for the National Assessment of Title I. Title I is the major federal program intended to improve the academic achievement of disadvantaged students, and the panel was charged with advising the government "on the methodological and other issues that arise in carrying out the mandated evaluation of Title I." 16

Perhaps BAEO's most notable expansion was in its funding base. In October 2002, BAEO received a \$600,000 federal grant, "to develop an intense public information campaign to reach parents about the choices available to them under the sweeping federal *No Child Left Behind Act*." According to a Department of Education press release, the

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[†] Though it is too early to get a full account of how BAEO is administering its federal grant, at least one example was reported in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*. The local chapter, run by Howard Fuller and Deborah McGriff, sent out postcards and established a hotline to promote a new program required under the federal "No Child Left Behind" law. In order to provide the required "supplemental services" – such as

campaign was to target communities in Dallas, Detroit, Milwaukee, and Philadelphia. Said Education Department Undersecretary Eugene Hickok, "We want to change the conversation about parental choice by positively influencing individuals who are resisting parental choice options and get them to reconsider their outlook." ¹⁷

In February 2003, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation awarded BAEO \$4 million to create 15 new high schools. Not only is this an enormous leap in funding, it is also quite a change in course for a group that has largely served a media advocacy function for a political movement.

The Money Tree

BAEO bills itself as a coalition of up-and-coming leaders working within the African-American community. But a closer look shows that BAEO has been bankrolled by a small number of right-wing foundations better known for supporting education privatization and affirmative action rollbacks than empowerment of the African American community or low-income families.

Four groups that BAEO originally listed as benefactors back in 2001 are major players in the right-wing voucher movement. In fact, the Walton Foundation and the Bradley Foundation have financed much of the movement. The Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation and the American Education Reform Council are pro-voucher advocacy groups that – while also receiving significant funding from the Walton and Bradley Foundations – are lending their own significant support to BAEO, the relative newcomer.

Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation

It is not surprising that BAEO is headquartered in Milwaukee. Wisconsin has been the linchpin of the voucher movement for over a decade and the Milwaukee-based Bradley Foundation has been at the center of the action. In 2001, the Bradley Foundation gave \$500,000 to BAEO for general operations.¹⁹

Providing not only money but also connections – Fuller describes Joyce as a longtime personal friend²⁰ – the Bradley Foundation's support brings BAEO into the forefront of the school voucher movement. Bradley has also funded Fuller's pro-voucher think tank at Milwaukee's Marquette University, the Institute for the Transformation of Learning (ITL). As of June 2001, the ITL received more than \$1.7 million from Bradley for its various projects.²¹

summer tutoring for students attending low-ranked schools – Milwaukee public schools diverted \$11 million from a summer school program that served 17,000 students to one that will serve about 5,000. Thousands of Milwaukee children may not be in summer school as a result of the funding switch. The new tutoring program was only half full according to a May 30, 2003 news report.

The Milwaukee school voucher program has long received crucial support from the Bradley Foundation. In fact, former Wisconsin School Superintendent John Benson says the program would never have started if it were not for Michael Joyce, president of the Bradley Foundation until July 2001. Joyce was "the firepower behind the voucher initiative," says Benson. "He's the one who fired up and then convinced then-Governor [Tommy] Thompson," Benson explains, "Without them, we wouldn't have school vouchers."

The Bradley Foundation played a key role when the Milwaukee voucher program came under legal challenge for violating the separation of church and state after the program expanded to allow tax-funded vouchers to be used in parochial schools. Bradley gave the state of Wisconsin \$350,000 to pay for the work that Kenneth Starr, former independent counsel, and his firm Kirkland & Ellis did to defend the voucher program before the Wisconsin State Supreme Court. ²³

The Bradley Foundation is considered one of the leading right-wing foundations in the country, granting more than \$355 million from 1985 to 1999 to right-wing think tanks, affirmative action rollback projects, and efforts to privatize the education system.

On the Bradley Foundation's grant list:

- The Heritage Foundation and American Enterprise Institute (AEI), two right-wing think tanks with considerable influence in Congress and the current Bush administration, received \$11 million and \$12 million respectively from Bradley between 1985-98.
- In addition to Heritage and AEI, Bradley funds a number of right-wing think tanks that are working to institute vouchers, tuition tax credits and other proposals that would funnel public money to private schools. This includes the Center for Education Reform, the Heartland Institute, the Claremont Institute and the Free Congress Foundation.
- The Center for the Study of Popular Culture has received almost \$4 million in Bradley grants since 1989. David Horowitz, the center's president, most recently caused an uproar on college campuses when he tried to run an ad in campus newspapers entitled "Ten Reasons Why Reparations for Slavery is a Bad Idea—and Racist Too." Horowitz's ninth reason asked "Where is the gratitude of black America" for the gift of "the highest standard of living of blacks anywhere in the world?" ²⁵
- Charles Murray, co-author of the highly controversial 1994 book *The Bell Curve*, which suggests African Americans are intellectually inferior to whites, received almost \$1 million from Bradley while at AEI.²⁶
- Anti-affirmative action groups are other Bradley favorites. This includes the American Civil Rights Institute, started by Ward Connerly, who led the successful effort to eliminate California's affirmative action programs in 1996, and the Center

for Individual Rights, which led a successful legal challenge to affirmative action at the University of Texas Law School.²⁷

John Walton and the Walton Family Foundation

BAEO started operations with a \$900,000 budget. According to the right-wing weekly *Human Events*, this came entirely from the Walton Family Foundation. Through the Walton Family Foundation, Wal-Mart heir John Walton is one of the voucher movement's most prolific donors, providing a steady stream of money for almost every element of the movement, from think tanks to political campaigns.

On the policy and research front, the Walton Foundation funds pro-voucher think tanks like the Goldwater Institute and the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research. On the legislative front, John Walton personally contributed \$2 million to the failed 2000 Michigan voucher initiative²⁸ as well as \$250,000 to California's Prop 174 in 1993, another unsuccessful voucher initiative.²⁹ Walton also bankrolled the California effort through his American Education Reform Foundation³⁰, as well as an unsuccessful 1997 voucher campaign in Minnesota.³¹

When voucher programs in Wisconsin and Ohio came under legal fire, right-wing legal groups like the Landmark Legal Foundation and Institute for Justice (IJ), with financial support from both the Walton and Bradley Foundations, defended them in court.³² IJ's co-founder, Clint Bolick, who previously worked for Landmark, has strong ties to the anti-affirmative action movement, authoring the book "The Affirmative Action Fraud: Can We Restore the American Civil Rights Vision?"

The Walton Foundation granted more than \$14 million in 2000 to private "scholarship" funds.³⁴ These private voucher programs are often started and funded by the same people who are lobbying for publicly-funded vouchers. They believe that privately-funded voucher programs will help create political momentum toward publicly-funded vouchers.

American Education Reform Council (AERC)

AERC poured \$185,000 – a whopping 65% of its grant money – into BAEO in 2001.³⁵ AERC, a tax-exempt 501(c)(3), is affiliated with the American Education Reform Foundation (AERF), which serves as AERC's lobbying arm. The two groups share office space and Susan Mitchell heads both groups.

AERC is intimately connected to BAEO in both staffing and funding. John Walton not only funds AERC – giving almost one million dollars via the Walton Foundation between 1999 and 2000³⁶ – but was also AERF's previous president and provided its initial grant.³⁷ The Bradley Foundation also supports AERC, providing \$300,000 grants in

1998 and 2000.³⁸ It is clear that the Bradley and Walton Foundations have a key role in both directly and indirectly funding BAEO.

In addition, Howard Fuller himself sits on the AERC board alongside John Walton.³⁹ Kaleem Caire stepped down from his position as executive director of BAEO to become Project Director for AERC's national effort to expand parent options.⁴⁰

As a 501(c)(3), AERC's political advocacy is restricted. It cannot endorse political candidates and may only do a minimal amount of lobbying on legislation. However, AERC ran "informational" advertisements during the Colorado and Michigan voucher campaigns in 1998 and 2000, respectively. AERC spent \$500,000 on the Michigan initiative, in addition to the \$2 million Walton spent out of his own pocket.

AERC activities apparently extend beyond advertising to organizing local grassroots organizations. A Friedman Foundation newsletter credits AERC and the Institute for Justice for working together to start Pensacola Parents For School Choice in May 2000.⁴¹

Without the restrictions of a 501(c)(3), AERF can participate in more overtly political activities. It was a major force behind failed efforts to get a voucher referendum on the California ballot in 1996 and 1998. Walton and AERF then teamed up with a combined \$410,000 in an unsuccessful attempt to pass Proposition 226, so-called "paycheck protection," in California to limit the use of union money being spent in political campaigns. The organizers of the anti-union measure all worked together on the state's failed 1993 voucher initiative and saw the measure as payback for money the teacher's union spent to "cream the measure."

AERF drew public criticism in 1997 when it hired Sterling Tucker, a community activist and former D.C. City Councilman, to organize support for a DC voucher program

Rooney and Teasley have extensive right-wing credentials. Teasley, former president of AERF, has worked for the Heritage Foundation, the libertarian Reason Foundation, and served in the Reagan White House Office of Public Liaison. Rooney has subsidized private vouchers in his home state of Indiana and told the right-wing Heartland Institute's *School Reform News*, "We are not going to fix the present system, so quit kidding ourselves." In the same interview, he recommended that readers "invade the schools."

[†] AERF's more political activities have, at times, been controversial. The group became embroiled in an investigation surrounding the 1997 re-election campaign of Wisconsin Supreme Court Justice Jon Wilcox, an important race given the court's role in deciding legal challenges to the voucher program. Wilcox opponent Walt Kelly accused Wilcox campaign manager Mark Block and get-out-the-vote organizer Brent Pickens of illegally coordinating campaign activities. The state election board launched an investigation that eventually included AERF. J. Patrick Rooney and Kevin Teasley, then AERF chairman and president, had met with Block after being notified of the importance of the Wilcox election to the Milwaukee voucher program by Bradley Foundation staffers. Although AERF was not found in violation of election law and reportedly denied repeated requests for contributions by Block, Teasley wrote to AERF board members and other voucher supporters, informing them of the importance of Wilcox's election. Following Teasley's letter, AERF board member Robert Thompson contributed \$10,000 to Wilcox's campaign, the maximum allowed under law.

designed by House Majority Leader Richard Armey (R-TX). Local officials opposed this congressional effort to impose a voucher program in the District of Columbia. Several black ministers, who had initially supported the program, later withdrew their support, accusing Tucker of misleading them about the program and not disclosing his connection with AERF.⁴⁵

Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation, Inc.

In 2001, the Milton and Rose Friedman Foundation gave \$20,000 to BAEO to write the group's amicus brief in the Cleveland voucher case argued before the Supreme Court. It also gave \$20,800 to BAEO's Indiana chapter. The Friedman Foundation gave a total of \$70,000 to Marquette University for a symposium on "Educational Options for African Americans" that was run by BAEO. Such meetings provided Fuller's base for launching BAEO. In 2000, The Friedman Foundation gave \$230,000 – over a quarter of its grant money for the year – to the AERC to cover production of five television and four radio commercials for BAEO.

Economist Milton Friedman and his wife Rose founded the Friedman Foundation in 1996 "as the first national foundation devoted exclusively to promoting parental choice." The Friedman Foundation promotes vouchers on a number of fronts. The group provides financial grants to groups like BAEO, but it also does a great deal of pro-voucher work directly out of its Indiana headquarters. For instance, the Foundation spent over \$3 million from 1999-2000 on its own ad campaigns promoting vouchers in California, Florida, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, New Mexico, Ohio, and Washington D.C. 51

Milton Friedman, who won a Nobel Prize for his work on monetary theory, is credited with laying the original academic framework for voucher theory in the 1950's. Friedman's academic work focuses more on the financial profits school privatization could reap rather than the purported assistance it could offer low-income students in failing schools – the interest BAEO purports to represent. In 1995 Friedman wrote, "the privatization of schooling would produce a new, highly active and profitable private industry." Friedman insists that voucher programs ought to include everyone, regardless of economic class. "Programs that are designed for the poor will be poor programs," he told the editor of the pro-voucher *School Reform News*. 53

The Friedman Foundation had assets totaling \$5.3 million in 1999, and also received \$100,000 from the Walton Foundation in 1999 and 2000.⁵⁴ J. Patrick Rooney, the wealthy voucher backer and former AERF chair, also sits on the Friedman Foundation Board. Rooney is also associated with the pro-voucher Greater Educational Opportunities Foundation, with which three BAEO board members are affiliated.

Other Grants

Financial documents show that contributions are coming from other right-wing groups as well. In 2001, the Olin Foundation gave \$100,000 for BAEO's "work to support parental choice in education," and the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation gave \$25,000.⁵⁵

BAEO Staff and Board Members

The BAEO board is composed entirely of African-American voucher supporters. It includes founder and president Howard Fuller and executive director Lawrence Patrick, along with a range of pro-voucher activists from the national, state and local levels. The BAEO board of directors includes many high-profile advocates, such as Former Rep. Floyd Flake (D-NY) and right-wing radio host Armstrong Williams. Some, like J. Kenneth Blackwell and Dwight Evans, are elected state officials. Others have made a career of working in charter or voucher schools or in private management companies that stand to gain from privatization of public schools.

Dr. Howard L. Fuller, President and Founder

With the help of generous funders such as the Bradley and Walton Foundations, former Milwaukee Public Schools Superintendent Howard Fuller founded BAEO to increase African-American support for the school voucher movement. BAEO grew out of conferences on school vouchers and African Americans that Fuller hosted at Marquette University, where he runs the Institute for the Transformation of Learning (ITL).

Born and raised in Milwaukee, Fuller served as Dean of General Education at the Milwaukee Area Technical College for two years and then headed up the Milwaukee County Department of Health and Human Services from 1988 to 1991. Fuller began to make a name for himself nationally by first devising an unsuccessful plan to create a separate black school district in 1987, and later becoming a prominent supporter of school vouchers in Milwaukee.

Fuller's 1991 appointment as Superintendent of Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) was a surprise to many in the community more accustomed to Fuller being "one of the school system's most vocal critics," as *Education Week* put it. ⁵⁶ The state legislature passed a special law exempting Fuller from the requirement that he have three years of precollegiate teaching experience before he could be confirmed to the post. ⁵⁷

In addition to supporting the Milwaukee voucher program, Fuller indicated his support for privatization efforts in other ways during his four-year stint as superintendent. He promoted state legislation to broaden Wisconsin's charter laws to allow private firms to run public schools without the use of district employees. Later, Fuller considered contracts from two for-profit school management firms, the Edison Project and Education

Alternatives Inc. – the latter a company owned and operated by BAEO funder John Walton – to run school-to-work programs. No deal, however, was ever finalized. Fuller also invited RAND Institute researcher and privatization advocate Paul T. Hill to speak to MPS administrators. Hill's 1995 RAND report, "Reinventing Public Education," details how to replace "the entire existing public education governance system" with a contracting system. ⁵⁸

Fuller resigned as superintendent in 1995 following school board elections in which four of five candidates backed by the teachers' union were elected. He said he did not want to face "death by a thousand cuts" from a school board critical of his agenda. After his resignation, Fuller founded the Institute for the Transformation of Learning (ITL) at Marquette University with significant financial help from the Bradley Foundation. ITL provides assistance to charter schools, runs Technology Resource Centers in Milwaukee and supports school voucher programs.

In 1998, Fuller became involved in city education policy again, this time as chair of the charter school review committee. Some local elected officials expressed concern over potential conflicts of interest because Fuller's wife, Deborah McGriff, works for the Edison Project, which operates charter schools in several cities. Fuller said that he would act appropriately if a conflict arose. ⁶¹

In 1999, then-Gov. George W. Bush asked Fuller to join his education policy advisory team, a group that included fellows from right-wing thinks tanks like the Hoover Institution and the Hudson Institute.⁶²

Lawrence Patrick, President and CEO

Lawrence C. Patrick III is the President and CEO of BAEO. The group's website describes Patrick as "the visionary leader and co-founder of Megaschool, a high technology start-up that provides technology services to schools across the country." Since taking over the position from Kaleem Caire in March 2002, Patrick has joined the ranks of voucher spokespeople.

Patrick described his mission quite simply in a *Wall Street Journal* article: "We're building our army. The main thing we focus on is organizing parents." He also seems to have the same combative style as BAEO founder Howard Fuller. In response to a report on charter schools released by the American Federation of Teachers, which represents 1 million educators and other professionals, Patrick charged that: "An AFT study on charter schools has about as much credibility as a Philip Morris study on smoking."

Other BAEO Board Members

- Right-wing media figure Armstrong Williams is perhaps the best-known BAEO board member. A former aide to Sen. Strom Thurmond (R-SC) and protégé of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, Williams is a vocal spokesperson for other right-wing positions, including opposing affirmative action and gay rights. 66
- Ohio Secretary of State J. Kenneth Blackwell is a prominent Republican who previously served as Undersecretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development during the first Bush Administration. Blackwell, a contributor to Alan Keyes' Black America's PAC, currently serves on the board of the Ohio School Choice Committee and the advisory board for Children First CEO America, a provoucher group founded by BAEO funder John Walton.
- Former Rep. Floyd Flake (D-NY), president of Edison Charter Schools, is one of several BAEO board members who run companies that either service charter schools or would otherwise stand to gain financially from further privatization of the public education system. Edison operates for-profit charter schools in 21 states plus the District of Columbia. According to the *National Journal*, Flake was the only member of the Congressional Black Caucus to support vouchers and he has continued to push for African American support of voucher programs since retiring.
- Deborah McGriff also works for Edison as president of Edison Teacher's College. McGriff is married to Howard Fuller and is a former superintendent herself. As of November 1999, McGriff reportedly had \$3 million in Edison stock options.⁶⁸
- William Breazell serves on the boards of two other pro-voucher organizations, Colorado Springs for School Choice (CSSC) and Children Having Opportunities in Colorado Education (CHOICE). Breazell claimed the national NAACP pressured him to resign as head of the Colorado Springs NAACP over his support for vouchers.
- Dale Sadler, another Colorado-based BAEO board member, sits on the CHOICE board with Breazell.
- Jacqueline Cissell is Community Relations Director for the Greater Educational Opportunities Foundation (GEOF), which is affiliated with both CHOICE and CSSC.
 The Friedman and Bradley foundations fund both BAEO and GEOF.
- Pennsylvania State Representative Dwight Evans, a Democrat, introduced voucher and tuition tax credit legislation repeatedly since joining the legislature in 1980.
 Evans' 1997 voucher proposal would have provided \$5,500 to students to "escape" failing schools and enroll in private schools at taxpayer expense instead.
- Amber Blackwell headed the New Village charter school in Oakland, California. The elementary school's ambitious goal was to teach about tolerance by exploring issues of race, class and sexual orientation in the curriculum. However, with 100 percent teacher turnover and financial troubles, New Village's charter was revoked as of the end of the 1999-2000 school year, making it one of only six schools in California to be "de-chartered" since the state began its charter school program in 1993.⁶⁹ "Charter

- schools can't be a mom-and-pop thing, and that's what we were a group of people with great intentions and little understanding of how to run a big system," Blackwell explained.
- Taunya Young was an administrator at a controversial school that was actually expelled from the Cleveland voucher program in January 2001. The Golden Christian Academy conducted all classroom instruction through videos targeted towards Christian home-schoolers.
- Delores Fridge is currently Vice Chairman of BAEO. She was chairperson of the Minnesota State Board of Education and traveled with Governor Arne Carlson on his trip to Singapore as the Governor's "Special Advisor in Education."
- Virginia Walden-Ford currently serves as Executive Director of D.C. Parents for School Choice, Inc. Walden-Ford has also worked for other local and national advocacy groups, including Friends of Choice in Urban Schools, National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise and the Center for Education Reform.⁷²
- Zakiya Courtney leads Parents for School Choice, a pro-voucher group. She served as the chairperson (1990-1994) for the Pupil Assignment Council of the Milwaukee voucher program and currently works at Howard Fuller's Institute for the Transformation of Learning at Marquette University.⁷³
- Kenneth Campbell is Vice President for Business Development for Mosaica Education, Inc. Campbell held a similar position for three years with Advantage Schools, Inc., joining Mosaica when the two companies merged in August 2001.⁷⁴
- Judy Burnette is a founder and member of the board of directors of the Coalition for Parent Choice in Education (CPCE) in Massachusetts, and served as executive director for the Children's Scholarship Fund (CSF) of Boston. She worked as an Education Policy Specialist for the Mayor of Boston, served as an appointee to the Massachusetts governor's Education Reform Review Commission.⁷⁵

Conclusion

BAEO's well-funded public relations campaign is the most recent tactic to emerge from the Right's strategic campaign to re-cast the image of the voucher movement and build broader political support for policies that would undermine the public education system. For years, the Right has tried to cultivate a small, but visible, base of African American support for its agenda on such issues as vouchers and gay rights.

Right-wing groups have also put a great deal of effort into cultivating African-American spokespeople, and working to counter the legacy of mistrust that communities of color have for a movement that has historically ranged from indifference to opposition toward racial justice efforts. Yet, at the same time, the right-wing political movement has continued to attack traditional civil rights leaders and initiatives.

BAEO is the latest step in the Right's long effort to portray school vouchers as the new civil rights fight. The group does bring together many African-American voucher supporters and only a fraction of them are involved in right-wing politics in general. But BAEO takes its place among the other think tanks and local organizations that have been created with money from right-wing foundations as well as individuals and organizations hoping to profit from promoting increased privatization of public education.

It is not surprising that BAEO has found support in the halls of power considering the individuals and foundations that have helped create it. Many of the group's members will no doubt find a profitable existence in the growing sector of private education businesses. However, some might take note of the experiences of Polly Williams, the Wisconsin state legislator who forged an alliance with Bradley and other right-wing voucher supporters to start the Milwaukee voucher program in the early 90s. Insistent that the program be limited to low-income children in urban areas, she found that her relations with the coalition grew cool. "I'm not supposed to have opinions. Whatever they decide to do, they call me and tell me what they decided and they expect me to do it," she said. Williams has since reconciled with the local NAACP and African-American voucher opponents, saying: "We've got to learn to be just as sophisticated and to know that we might be fighting on this issue, but on the next issue we will probably be together."

Endnotes

¹ Price, Joyce Howard. "Poor Youths Need School Choice, Alliance Says," *Washington Times*, August 25, 2000. A downloadable press release from BAEO's Web site provides information on specifically which newspapers and radio and television markets ads ran on.

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⁴ Henry, Tamara. "Alliance Promotes Vouchers," USA Today, A1, May 7, 2001.

⁵ "Milwaukee Employers Join Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO) To Set the Record Straight on School Choice," press release from BAEO and the Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce, May 21, 2001.

⁶ Coeyman, Marjorie. "Vouchers Get a Boost from Black Alliance," *Christian Science Monitor*, July 10, 2001, accessed online July 10, 2001 via: www.csmonitor.com/durable/2001/07/10/text/p19s1.html

⁷ Annenberg Public Policy Center press release, "New Annenberg Research Tracks over \$105 Million in Inside-the-Beltway Print and TV Issue Ads During the 107th Congress," June 19, 2003. Accessed via: http://www.appcpenn.org/issueads/final%20release.pdf

⁸ This page describing the details of BAEO's activity shows that there was no spending during 2002: http://www.appcpenn.org/issueads/organizations/black_alliance_for_educational_options.htm

⁹ Annenberg Public Policy Center press release, June 19, 2003.

- This page describing spending on education issues includes the details on voucher spending: http://www.appcpenn.org/issueads/issues_education.htm
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- ¹² "Black Alliance is on the Move," Barato Britt, *School Reform News*, 9/01.
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Community Voice or Captive of the Right? A Closer Look at the Black Alliance for Educational Options

PFAW is an energetic advocate for the values and institutions that sustain diverse a democratic society. Many of these are now threatened by the influence of the radical right and its allies who have risen to positions of political power. Our most fundamental rights and freedoms—and even our basic constitutional framework—are at risk. PFAW works in close collaboration with other leading national and state progressive organizations to mobilize Americans at this defining moment in our history.

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