

## VOUCHERS: PROS AND CONS, PART I

by Tom Kertes

The debate on school vouchers is a hot-button issue that has spawned a wide range of strong opinions. *Education Update* has interviewed politicians, administrators, par-

ents, unions, Board of Education and Board of Regents members, to provide insight into the issues. Vouchers are a way to partially privatize public education. Under voucher proposals, a portion of the public education

**Dr. Jerry Cammarata**, member of the New York City Board of Education: "The greatest contribution we can give to children is to place the management of their education into a competitive environment. The human soul always seems to prosper when the competition among people is at its peak. The application of competition, as is defined and practiced within the corporate community, has every bit of relevance and significant importance to administering education to our youngsters. Vouchers represent a reform of commitment to educational excellence and has a place within public education."

budget allocated by state and local governments would be given to parents who could then choose to use it as tuition to send their children to private or parochial schools.

The introduction of even the most modest vouchers system would require an amendment to the New York State Constitution, which currently forbids any public tax monies to be used in aid of private or parochial education.

**Assemblyman Steve Sanders** (D-Manhattan), Chairman of the New York State Assembly Education Committee: "I vehemently oppose school vouchers. With respect to parochial schools, they would be a flagrant violation of our State Constitution. New York State historically maintained a clear separation between the funding of elementary and secondary public schools and money used for private schools. We have never provided any

direct or indirect public financial assistance to offset tuition fees for non-public schools, nor should we."

**Donald Singer**, President of the Council of Supervisors and Administrators of the City of New York:

Vouchers have been proposed as a means of providing better schools. The premise is that the free market competition will lead to the creation of more effective schools. Thus vouchers may give the appearance of being very attractive. However, the recent experience in Boston revealed that vouchers, instead, enforced economic and ethnic segregation. This occurred because, as vouchers couldn't possibly cover the entire tuition for private or parochial schools, only the more affluent families were able to cover the difference in expenditure.

**Ricardo Oquendo**, member of the New York State Board of Regents: "This is a very difficult issue. Difficult because, both philosophically and pedagogically, I vehemently oppose the privatization of public education. In fact, I feel that public education is one of the greatest achievements of our democracy. But reality, in the form of a generally underperforming public school system, has changed my perception to the point where I'm willing to have an open mind and listen to specific proposals about vouchers. But, I must admit, it would have to be one great proposal in order to overcome my deep-seated objections."