

*Do as we say, not as we do*  
*Stats show teachers far more likely to choose private*  
*schools for their own kids*

*By*

*Dr. Alan Bonsteel,*  
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It's hard to think of who would be a better expert on the quality of Orange County's public schools than the teachers who work there. It may come as a shock, therefore, to discover that these public school teachers are abandoning their government-run schools and sending their own kids to private schools at a far higher rate than the general public.

According to a new study based on the 2000 Census by educational researcher Denis Doyle of Chevy Chase, Md., 24.5 percent of the public school teachers in the Los Angeles/Long Beach area - a Census urban region that includes much of Orange County - are sending their own children to private schools, versus only 15.7 percent of the general public.

If the Southland were exceptional, it might be easy to shrug off the numbers. But throughout the state and the nation, the numbers tell the same story. In six of 11 California metropolitan areas studied by Doyle, including four of the five largest, public school teachers send their kids to private schools at a higher rate than the public. In these California metropolitan areas, 14.5 percent of public school teachers are sending their children to private schools, versus 12.3 percent of the general public. Throughout the nation's cities, 21.5 percent of public school teachers are sending their kids to private schools vs. only 17.5 percent of the general public.

Debate is the lifeblood of a democracy, and hardly any issue today is more hotly debated than school choice, with reformers eager to build on school choice successes and the old guard pleading for one last chance to fix our broken government-run schools. But hardly anything will get a debater laughed off the stage faster, and end the debate quicker, than proof that the debater's private life doesn't square with the public posturing.

Congress this year enacted the nation's newest school choice program in Washington, D.C. What tipped the scales toward passage was the revelation that not one congressional opponent of the program was willing to enroll his or her children in Washington's public schools, with the vast majority of those kids sent to private schools. Actions do, after all, speak louder than words.

We've long known that school choice opponents Bill Clinton, Al Gore, Ted Kennedy and Jesse Jackson sent all of their kids to private schools. So do many of the

children of teachers union bosses, among the bitterest opponents of school choice because their paychecks depend on holding children captive in their schools. Now, we have the most telling data of all: the actual numbers of how many of the inside experts on the quality of our public schools, the teachers themselves, are rejecting those schools for their own children.

Hardly any aspect of American society is more divisive than the monopoly our public schools have on the education of our children. Wealthier families have the financial means to send their children to higher-quality private schools, or to be able to buy a house in a fancy neighborhood with relatively good public schools. Meanwhile, poorer, and mostly minority, families are balkanized into dysfunctional, racially segregated public schools, turning our low-income Hispanic and African-American families into a permanent underclass. Especially here in California, the shockingly high dropout rates of these minority kids have led them to gangs and guns and crammed our prisons to overflowing.

When Doyle released his last results, in 1994, there was only a single school choice program in the United States, in Milwaukee, and it enrolled only about 2,500 students. Most observers didn't expect it to survive the legal onslaughts of the National Education Association. Survive it did, however, and there are now five publicly funded K-12 school choice programs throughout the United States. We have now reached a critical mass where the success of school choice will be obvious to all.

As Will Rogers once said, "People don't change their minds because of arguments. They change their minds because of observation."

The debate on school choice is over. The end is near for the monopoly.