

THE CITY OF PROVIDENCE
STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS

RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL

No. 592

Approved December 13, 1973

RESOLVED, that the Providence City Council requests that the Providence School Department look into the advisability of applying for a grant to the Federal Government for a school voucher system, on a pilot and trial basis, as has been inaugurated by several school systems, as per the photostat of the New York Times article attached hereto and made a part hereof.

IN CITY COUNCIL
DEC 6 1973
READ AND PASSED

Robert J. Hayton
PRES.
Vincent Vespecci
CLERK

APPROVED

MAYOR

Joseph A. Locke
DEC 13 1973

RECEIVED TO COMMISSIONER
FIRST READING
IN CITY COUNCIL
EX-115

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VOUCHER BID DIES IN NEW ROCHELLE

School District Ends Talks
With U. S. on Project

By JAMES FERON

Special to The New York Times

NEW ROCHELLE, Oct. 20—The New Rochelle school district revealed yesterday that it had terminated discussion with Federal officials over a plan to introduce the controversial "school voucher" system.

Under that system, parents would be permitted to the public funds to send children to schools of the parents' choice. It is currently in use only in the Alum Rock district of San Jose, Calif.

New Rochelle educators began studying the possibility of experimenting with the system three years ago, and last February the district embarked on a formal feasibility study, supported by a \$40,000 grant from the Office of Economic Opportunity.

Richard Olcott, assistant to the superintendent, said however, that "differences in philosophy" had led to conflicts between the school and the financing agency, resulting in abandonment of the study last week.

'Operationally Oriented'

One of the basic problems, he indicated, was that the officials in Washington saw New Rochelle as the source of research material for a national program, while the school's objectives were local in scope and "operationally oriented."

Federal officials wanted a minimum of 4,000 students in the experiment, he said, "but we felt that was too much, almost the whole of our elementary population—we wanted to start with a smaller sample."

"Although he did not say so, introducing the new system to the entire school district at once might have created insurmountable opposition in a community where misgivings have been evident from the start.

The voucher system has drawn heavy support from those in favor of making schools compete for pupils and funds, and has attracted fierce opposition from others who see it as promoting racial and economic segregation.

It has also been attacked as a backdoor means of supporting parochial and private schools. Mr. Olcott said that the New Rochelle experiment would have been limited only to the district's public schools.

Needs Mobility to Work

He acknowledged, though, that one of the reasons for abandoning the experiment was "we felt it was not possible to protect against the segregation of students along racial and socio-economic lines." New Rochelle's school population is 20 per cent black.

"The voucher system needs mobility to work," he said, "but not at the risk of such segregation." The Federal Government, on the other hand, was anxious to see how a city of mixed population responded to such a possibility, Mr. Olcott said.

He said the timetable required by the National Institute of Education, which became the financing agency during the course of the experiment, was too short, considering the scale of change represented by the vouchers. The plan would have had to be introduced by September, 1974, he said.

Federal authorities also sought greater mobility than the school district was prepared to give. "Unnecessary intradistrict movement," he said, "would have made the total plan politically unattractive."

A scheme of comprehensive enrollment, with each child having access to each school, would have been self-defeating, he indicated. "What happens if a school is filled? Nobody is guaranteed access to any school in that case," he commented.

Larger Grant Sought

New Rochelle also objected to the amount of compensatory vouchers — extra grants for children with learning difficulties—as being too low. It also objected to the necessity of establishing a voucher advisory committee. Such a committee, he said, would expand from a watchdog role to that of rival to the school board.

He added that the school district, which hired consultants to conduct the study, had sought a grant of \$140,000 to study political as well as operational feasibility, but the smaller amount it received made it impossible to do both.

The experiment at Alum Rock, which is an economically hard-pressed district, has seen a drop in unexcused absences and vandalism as well as improved student morale, according to one of the school principals. The plan is being extended from six to 13 of the