Community Controversies: The Politics of Educational Alternatives in Alum Rock, 1970-1976

Kaitlyn Gilmore

Senior Honors Thesis
Department of History
University of California, Santa Barbara
Professor O'Connor; Professor Miescher
March 2007

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to several individuals who played pivotal roles in assisting me in my completion of this academic endeavor. Thank you to my faculty mentor, Professor Alice O'Connor, for providing me with her time, guidance, patience, and invaluable feedback to help me to shape my argument, and think critically about the issues of social experimentation, educational alternatives, and life. I would also like to acknowledge my faculty thesis advisor, Professor Stephan Miescher, because without his constructive revisions and insight this paper would never have been completed. My peer research group has also been vital in providing me with support throughout this project.

Additionally, I appreciate the financial assistance provided by the UCSB Undergraduate Research and Creative Arts Office (URCA), which afforded me the resources to investigate the community of Alum Rock in greater detail. Lastly, I am very gracious to both Margie Kensit and Armando Valdez for candidly sharing their reflections on the Alum Rock Voucher Demonstration and district politics, which undoubtedly enriched my understanding on the controversial nature of educational reform.

List of Abbreviations

ARUSD	Alum Rock Union School District
CSPP	Center for the Study of Public Policy
CPE	Center for Planning and Evaluation
EVA	Education Voucher Authority
EVAC	Education Voucher Advisory Committee
EVC	Education Voucher Commission
NIE	National Institute of Educaiton
OEO	Office of Economic Opportunity
PTA	Parent Teacher Association

I. Introduction

Nestled on the eastside of San Jose, California, the town of Alum Rock is home to one of the most economically disadvantaged school districts in the country. Data from the California Department of Education shows that during the 2005/2006 school years approximately 99.7 percent of students in the Alum Rock Union Elementary School District (ARUSD) qualified to receive federally funded free lunches, based on their annual family income. Of ARUSD's 13,500 students, 96.9 percent of children come from minority backgrounds. Alum Rock schools rank in the bottom five percent of elementary and middle school student achievement for the entire state of California.[1]

Today, the chipped paint covering ARUSD's Pala Middle School, located down the road from the district administrative office, symbolizes the lack of available district funds to cover up years of deterioration. Since 1972, when the United States Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) began implementing the first federally funded voucher experiment in Alum Rock, minimal structural improvements have been made to Pala's exterior, and more broadly, to ARUSD's administrative infrastructure. As ARUSD's persisting budgetary issues and low-academic achievement suggest, playing the government's guinea pig in federal social experimentation during the 1970s failed to invoke lasting systemic changes for the district.

In the summer of 1970, William Jefferds, Superintendent of ARUSD, attended the Center for the Study of Public Policy's (CSPP) presentation to the Special Study Committee of the California State Parent Teacher Association (PTA) on the prospect of instituting a "regulated compensatory" voucher system in select low-income school

[1] California Department of Education, "District Comparison Results," Education Data Partnership, <www.edata.k12.ca.us/Navigation/fsTwoPanel.asp?bottom=%2Fprofile%2Easp%3Flevel%3D05%26reportNumber%3D16> (accessed March 4, 2007).

districts. The CSPP field representative explained that the voucher system was based on an untested voucher model, and sought to create competition in education by offering parents in disadvantaged communities the opportunity to select a school reflective of their children's needs.

CSPP noted that OEO was searching for a low-income district to participate in a federal voucher "experiment," financed through a series of grants to cover planning, set-up, initial implementation, and evaluation of the voucher program.[2] OEO required interested school districts to conduct a feasibility study to legitimize district's support and administrative competency to carry out the voucher experiment. Upon becoming Alum Rock's Superintendent in 1968, Jefferds pursued policies of decentralizing decision making on the school level, increasing parental involvement, and the number of minority staff members in the district.[3]

Alum Rock's student achievement scores ranked among the lowest in California, and in March 1970, Jefferds suspended all purchasing throughout the district due to insufficient educational resources. Jefferds' hopes to reform the school system took a backseat to ARUSD's dire financial situation, unless state finance legislation was passed to assist the district.[4] Following the voucher pitch, Jefferds returned to Alum Rock Board of Trustees (also know as the Alum Rock school board) to present the voucher model. He highlighted the potential for federal involvement to facilitate structural changes and alleviate the district's financial woes. The superintendent's initial curiosity in the voucher experiment sparked the restructuring of over half of Alum Rock Union School District's

---

[2] Daniel Weiler, *A Public School Voucher Demonstration: The First Year at Alum Rock*, v.3, (Santa Monica, California: RAND Corporation, 1974), 4.
[3] Weiler, *A Public School Voucher Demonstration*, v.1, ix.
[4] N.a. "Legislative Step Eases Alum Rock Financial Crisis." *San Jose Mercury News*, 30 June 1970.

schools in 1972. Although the "transitional voucher model" implemented during the first year of the Alum Rock demonstration differed from CSPP's "regulated compensatory model," the demonstration exemplified the potential for teachers and staff in disadvantaged school districts to exercise nominal decision making power and establish a platform for individualized curriculums for students.

In the 1960s and early 1970s the concept of education vouchers roused political debate between school boards, teachers and community organizations, as well as conservatives and liberals. Critics, who were skeptical of the ability for vouchers to equalize public education in disadvantaged communities, cited previous uses of vouchers in the late 1950s and 1960s to resist integration. Complicating the voucher idea was the federal government's vested interest in educational experimentation, and the belief that increased parental involvement, through vouchers, would improve public education in poor communities. In Alum Rock, the combination of these factors conveyed the underpinnings of voucher thought. Yet more vividly Alum Rock displayed how OEO approaches to educational reform reflected the controversial politics of poverty, social experimentation, and community control during the 1960s and 1970s.

The purpose of this study is to explore shifting national paradigms of education reform and community involvement strategies for low-income and racially stratified communities, and how they played out during throughout this shift, and specifically in the Alum Rock voucher plan during the 1970s. The roles and relationships between Superintendent Jefferds, the Alum Rock Board of Trustees, and members of the Alum Rock community revealed the unique coalescence of decentralization in public schools,

and the apprehension of administrators to delineate real decision-making power to parents (with potentially little knowledge of the education system).

Throughout this period, the ambiguities characterizing community involvement and political representation were conveyed through the local media, district reports, and research analysis of the demonstration. Alum Rock's Mexican-American community, situated in the political context of their emerging Chicano identity, was repeatedly excluded from central school district decision-making throughout the voucher plan. Regardless of the political oppression by the small group of board members, precluding the voucher system the community investigated a variety of educational reform measures specifically in tune with the needs of the community.

The Alum Rock voucher model is discounted by many educational alternative scholars and school choice advocate due to the government's inability to stage a voucher experiment that produced quantifiable effect of parental choice on their student's academic achievement, or as a means to produce resonating reforms throughout district schools. In Alum Rock, the reality the authority remained vested in Alum Rock school board members and administrators, underscored the reluctance of local and federal governing structures to implement effective mechanisms for community empowerment. The Alum Rock example shows that the Mexican-American community did have something to say, but the established system denied Mexican-Americans a legitimate arena to express their educational reform. The exploration of the Alum Rock voucher system and political climate in the 1970s, reveals the experiences of Alum Rock's community during the voucher system, and additionally unveils how repetition of

community exclusion was the fundamental failure of experiments in antipoverty policy, alleged decentralization, and vouchers.

Alum Rock's district leadership poignantly maneuvered OEO and the community into believing that education vouchers could help improve the position of the community's poor. Chronically this episode in untested educational reform by observing propensity for school vouchers to increase parental and community involvement, the extent to which that goal was addressed by the administrative leadership in Alum Rock, and the ways it materialized in practice, provides lessons in the on-going struggle for public education to meet the plethora of consumer needs. The Alum Rock Voucher Demonstration embodied the paradoxical approaches the federal government and local school district employed in on-going efforts experiment with the poor advance ideological through educational reforms.

II. Educational Reform Thought

The Alum Rock voucher demonstration occurred within an atmosphere of educational experimentation, in which two of the most volatile ideas being tested included vouchers and decentralization. The historical experiences with both tools of education reform produced notable and persuasive controversy during the 1960s. Fundamentally, the school voucher concept sought to incorporate a market mechanism into the education system. Education vouchers can simply be defined as tuition certificates, which are given to parents to pay for their children's education at a school of their choice. On the other hand, decentralizing public education involves giving individual principals, teachers, and parents the opportunity to play greater roles in school decision-making, reasoning that

breaking up the bureaucratic nature of public school administration can engage parents and conservely improve student achievement.[5] While many voucher models have emerged over the last sixty years, the models created by Milton Friedman and Christopher Jencks represent the most fundamental elements of voucher theory. The voucher system allows parents to be consumers in the educational marketplace, allowing them to shop around for the most attractive education for their child.[6]

The conceptual framework of the Alum Rock's voucher program resulted from of a combination of landmark social, political, and ideological developments over the course of the 1950s and 1960s. University of Chicago economist Milton Friedman and Harvard sociologist Christopher Jencks' thoughts on the voucher concept and decentralization contributed to OEO's exploration of vouchers as antipoverty policy. Friedman first proposed the idea of school vouchers in his 1955 article, "The Role of Government in Education," as a way to eliminate the government monopoly in public education through a denationalized education system.[7] His concept defined a voucher as a tuition sum given to parents to apply towards the cost of education at a school of their choice.

In exploring a market approach to education Friedman identified that "good" public schools were predominantly located in high-income neighborhoods. Friedman believed that it was essential for a democratic society to provide at least minimal education for its citizens, and that a free educational marketplace model could effectively create competition in efforts to improve the quality of education.

---

[5] Robert G. Shadick, "The Myth of the Apathetic Parent," *The Journal of Negro Education*, vol.39, no.2 (1970): 184.
[6] Weiler. *A Public School Voucher Demonstration*, v.2, 2.
[7] Milton Friedman, "The Role of Government in Education," *Free Republic*, 1955. The idea of vouchers gained more notoriety when Friedman released *Capitalism and Freedom*, [(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 85-98.], and included the article as a chapter in the book.

Privatizing the educational marketplace, Friedman contended, created healthy competition by delegating parents the power to select a school reflective of their child's educational needs. Friedman's free-market model suggested that allowing parents to choose between private and public schools "would permit competition to develop," consequentially stimulating all schools to improve and develop more responsive curriculums and administrative structures.[8]

In theory, vouchers parents of all socioeconomic statuses the ability to choose the school best suited for their children's interests and educational needs. As a government run institution, public schools were structured to satisfy the needs of the majority of students. Being so, parents of children with special needs or abilities, without the means to send their children to private institutions, were forced to submit to the one-size-fits-all curricula and policies at public schools. Friedman hoped that voucher systems would undercut the enlarged and centralized public school bureaucracies, which denied parents and teachers decision-making power. Relegating power for parents to select their children's school would allow children to compete with others of different socio-economic statuses and racial backgrounds, but also left room for parents to congregate with families of similar backgrounds.[9]

Vouchers sparked skepticism among teacher organizations and minority advocacy groups, who feared that under that affluent or white families would utilize vouchers to undermine integration in racially divisive or low-income communities. Despite the antagonism Friedman's concept created among voucher critics, Freidman planted the

---

[8] Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*. 92.
[9] Ibid., 91.; Terry M. Moe, *Schools, Vouchers, and the American Public*, (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2001), 17-18.

seeds for vouchers proclivity to address the educational needs of varying echelons of American society, and resonated with social policymakers for years to come.

Harvard sociologist Christopher Jencks discussed the ability for vouchers to promote social equality and enable the decentralization of public education. He first prompted OEO to offer federal grants to test voucher feasibility in his 1966 article, "Is the Public School Obsolete?"[10] Coalescing with Friedman's theory that education vouchers could break down the public school "monopoly," Jencks discussed how instituting a system of tuition grants or management contracts would overcome the economic and social barriers facing "slum" children. Jencks utilized the growing abundance of statistics relating poverty to educational attainment to substantiate his argument for pursuing alternative education systems. A study by the National Institute of Education Researchers had presented data that taxpayers contributed nearly fifty percent more towards the education of affluent children than poor children, given low-income children's later start in formal education and higher drop out rates.[11]

The large bureaucratic nature of school boards that governed the majority of low-income public schools made them unwilling to relinquish any control to individual schools and parents, or financially or structurally reform the schools to better serve students and families. Instead, schools in uncompetitive and disadvantaged communities aimed "not at profit but survival." Jencks explained that allowing parents to use tuition grants in public education would force schools and teachers to compete for students and counteract the uncompetitive nature of public schooling; more attractive schools with higher enrollment received more money to continue to improve the individual school.

---

[10] Christopher Jencks, "Is the Public School Obsolete?" *The Public Interest*, v.2, no. 2 (1966), 18-27.
[11] Ibid, 18-20.

Conversely, unattractive schools with low enrollment would close to make room and funds available for successful schools.[12] The idea of providing slum families the same education choice as wealthy children, through tuition grants, perceivably aligned with the government's awareness of social equity. Jencks' observations of the public school system in low-income communities virtually mirrored the situation facing Alum Rock in the 1970s, although Jencks' progressive approach excluded any discussion of the ability of vouchers to remedy a budget deficit, such as the predicament in Alum Rock.

In a subsequent study, Jencks, who would pen the OEO-sponsored voucher study *A Report on Financing Elementary Education by Grants to Parents* in 1970, took great lengths to explain the derivations and discrepancies of inequality in American public education, but this time without referencing vouchers as a solution. He enumerated that even in the political arena, the idea of "maximum feasible participation" of America's poor "implied that more 'leaders' should be black and poor, *not* that power should be equally distributed between leaders and followers."[13]

In Alum Rock, Superintendent Jefferds and the school board echoed this sentiment, even if they asserted the unlimited potential for vouchers to expand community participation. Jencks suggested that school districts institute "open enrollment," also known as "freedom of choice" plans accompanied by free transportation to schools outside a student's given district to level the playing field between students from different communities.[14] The concept of freedom of choice presented a vivid example of how

---

[12] Jencks, "Is the Public School Obsolete?", 22-23, 27., emphasis added.
[13] Christopher Jencks, *Inequality: A Reassessment of the Effects of Family School in America*, (New York, New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1972), 4.
[14] Jencks, *Inequality*, 6.

voucher systems were utilized not to equalize educational opportunity, but instead ensure that public and private education remained segregated and unequal.

Following the Supreme Court's pivotal decision in the 1954 case of *Brown v. Board of Education,* the federal government adopted a more activist role in civil rights policy, including developing educational reforms aimed at equalizing educational opportunities for disadvantaged Americans. The *Brown* decision ruled that segregation in public schools was unconstitutional, and that education is a "right, which must be made available to all on equal terms."[15] As a result of the *Brown II* (1955) ruling, the federal government mandated public education institutions to integrate with "all deliberate speed."[16] Schools in Virginia and Atlanta first employed voucher systems, called "freedom of choice" plans, attempting to resist racially desegregating their communities' schools. The evolution of school vouchers from a resistance technique to an antipoverty policy resulted from the government's frustration with the cycle of low educational achievement in economically disadvantaged communities during an era of social policy experimentation.

By the 1960s, communities searching for a means to resist integration in community schools viewed freedom of choice plans as their way to sidestep federal intent. During the same period, critics of vouchers viewed the theory's proclivity to increase socioeconomic and racial segregation as a central argument against implementing vouchers as a federal education, and nonetheless, *equalization*, technique. These beliefs were not unfounded, as communities in Prince Edward County, Virginia

[15] *Brown v. Board of Education,* 347 U.S. 483 (1954).
[16] *Brown v. Board of Education II,* 349 U.S. 249 (1955).

and Atlanta, Georgia employed freedom of choice plans to maintain the racial homogeneity of their school systems.

Despite the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown* that racially segregated schools were unconstitutional, the Virginia State Board of Education advised Virginia public schools to maintain separate schooling for whites and blacks for the 1954-55 school year.[17] The board of supervisors and local white politicians contended that Prince Edward County would never be able to integrate the state's public schools successfully because of their devout belief in segregation. Given Prince Edward County's aggressive court strategy to resist integration, the U.S. District Fourth Circuit Court ruled on August 4, 1958, that the county would have until 1965, ten years following the *Brown v. Board of Education II* decision, to desegregate all of the county's schools, as other communities throughout the South were able to do the same.

Rather than comply with gradual integration plans for county public schools, white county officials in Prince Edward County chose to shut down public schools completely.[18] From 1959 through 1964, the county's black families eager to provide an education for their children were forced to move to another county or pay for a private school. Unfortunately, the majority of PE County's black families were unable to pursue such alternatives because of constricting economic situations, causing nearly 2,300 black children to fall even further behind academically.

---

[17] Kenneth J. Morland. *The Tragedy of Public Schools: Prince Edward County Virginia (A Report for the Virginia Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights)*, (16 January 1964), <http://www.library.vcu.edu/jbc/speccoll/report1964.pdf> 08 November 2006, 7-8.

[18] Virginia House of Delegates, *House Joint Resolution No. 613*, (2003). On February 13, 2003, the Virginia House of Delegate and Senate expressed their "deep regret" for the Prince Edward County school closings from 1959-1964. They formally acknowledged the detrimental effects the school closings had on the entire community, causing "wounding the human spirit," and causing "job home losses...and a deep sense of despair within the African-American community."

In place of the state funded public schools for all students, the county board of supervisors approved state scholarship grants to be used by white students at only the county's private schools. PE County denied African-American students these grants, even though their tax dollars financed the education of neighboring white students. White families received freedom of choice among local private schools within the county to use the state tuition grants, which established a foundational basis for school voucher plans. In 1964, when *Griffin v. School Board of Prince Edward County* reached the U.S. Supreme Court, following nearly ten years of massive resistance to integration, the Court abrogated the county's system of private schooling and tuition grants under the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment and the *Brown II* decision.[19] PE County laid the foundations for outright opposition and antagonism of the voucher concept during the 1960s and 1970s.

Pressure to integrate public schools and the issue of neighborhood school plans played a decisive role in Georgia's gubernatorial elections of 1960. Georgia's incumbent and devout segregationist Governor Ernest Vandiver, expressed his discontent with Supreme Court decisions on education as imposing "a second Reconstruction on the South," and his dedication to the "preservation of our way of life."[20] In an effort to solicit statewide support for segregation, he organized various white Georgia male elites from Southern counties to form the Sibley Commission and report on the feasibility of closing the state's public school system as a form of massive resistance to desegregation.[21] The commission's report devised freedom of choice plans as a "pragmatic segregation"

---

[19] *Griffin v. School Board of Prince Edward County*. 375 U.S. 391 (1964).
[20] Matthew Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 67.
[21] Ibid, 81.

technique to appease Georgians seeking to abolish the entire public school system, as well as open-school advocates looking to comply with *Brown.*

Within this report, the Sibley Commission also proposed private school tuition grants to white parents resisting integration. Despite a state sponsored segregation campaign, the suburban organization HOPE (Help Our Public Education), founded by biracial open-school integration advocates, launched "Operation Last Chance," for all children's right to education. Atlanta's Judge Hooper's ruled in August 1960, that "for affluent families in the island suburbs, 'freedom of choice' resonated as an ideological synthesis of the desegregation policy that permitted high-achieving black students to break the caste line, combined with the middle-class philosophy of consumer rights that guaranteed neighborhood schools protected by residential segregation." [22]

While school boards selected limited numbers of high achieving African-Americans to cross over the tracks and participate in freedom of choice schooling, Atlanta school boards predominantly packed the majority of black students in disadvantaged south-side Atlanta communities into segregated neighborhood schools, regardless of the open capacity in local white schools. [23] Unlike freedom of choice plans advocated by liberal education reformers, the Atlanta episode displayed the virulent white resistance to integration with of freedom of choice and tuition grant plans, as Atlanta segregationists implemented conciliatory tactics to resist the integration of blacks and low-income families into their neighborhood schools.

In the 1960s, school choice or voucher were not the only educational alternatives that alienated educational reformers intent on boosting educational performance in public

[22] Ibid. 103.
[23] Ibid. 105-107.

schools. While a variety of groups believed in the value of decentralized public education, controversy surrounded the level to which that decentralization should travel. The struggle for school administrators and teachers to forfeit decision-making power to parents as the federal government simultaneously strove for community participation in disadvantaged communities, played out in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville community of Brooklyn before Alum Rock.

Some of the most audible voices opposing school choice and decentralization of public schools came from teachers and administrators. In 1968, white teachers in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville, New York community went on strike resisting the efforts of black parents to gain "community control" of schools, calling for district curriculums reflective of black values and community needs.[24] Ocean Hill-Brownsville, a small community of school within New York City, home to one of the largest school districts in the United States, which in the late 1960s experienced an influx in black student enrollment. Black leaders, having "lost all confidence in the white leadership's desire to educate their children," challenged public school policymakers to enable black community groups to play a larger role in decision-making.[25] Teacher unions had recently attained greater policymaking power, and felt threatened by the prospect of community groups and parents undoing their achievement.

On the other hand, community groups viewed increased teacher autonomy as another way for bureaucratic parties to place self-serving priorities above their academic goals for their children's education. The challenge Ocean Hill-Brownsville black parents presented to the district – the prospect of giving parents of lower-achieving and

---

[25] Michael D. Usdan, "An Analysis of New York City Participation Experiments," *Theory into Practice*, vol. 8, no. 4, (October 1969): 267.

predominantly minority students decision making abilities – became an important goal of OEO's voucher created later that year by the Center for the Study of Public Policy. Teachers believed that transferring sharing their power with lower-income parents, and some with limited educational attainment, was a risky and untested idea, discounting the knowledge and expertise of teachers and school administrators in school decision making.

Parents did not succeed in acquiring significantly more control of the Ocean Hill-Brownsville schools from 1969-70, but Michael Usdan asserted that the civil rights movement and antipoverty policies ignited community response in poor and minority neighborhoods, like Ocean Hill-Brownsville, that could not be reversed.[26] The initiative of black parents in Ocean Hill-Brownsville served as a catalyst for community-based initiatives towards school decentralization, manifested in their desire for public education to individualize curriculums cognizant of student's background and respective needs.[27] This event helped draw more attention to the grassroots movement of low-income communities who demanded a more distinct role in deciding their children's educational future, not just more money.

Although teacher organizations remained united against decentralization to parents, they lobbied for increased autonomy within their individual schools. Tuition grants in Prince Edward County, freedom of choice in Atlanta, and community control in Ocean Hill-Brownsville exposed the politics of poverty, racism, and community involvement into local efforts to reform public education. Likewise, the Alum Rock voucher program fused each of these elements, in the Office of Economic Opportunity's venture to use social

[26] Ibid. 267-269.
[27] Ibid.

experiments as a vehicle for antipoverty policies addressing the educational inferiorities in disadvantaged communities.

III. OEO and Educational Experimentation

Understanding the historical scope of the Alum Rock voucher program in 1972 requires an explanation of the shifts both in the federal government's approach to social policy-making and specifically in addressing antipoverty policy. During the 1960s, President Johnson and Congress created legislation with a significant emphasis on social justice. War on Poverty and civil rights legislation often promoted policies that sought to equalize various realms of American society, especially in terms of educational practice. Section 402 of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 clearly demonstrated the government's newfound reliance on social policy research to validate their social theories, and the belief that these results would in turn affect social policy. This section of the Civil Rights Act stipulated:

> [To] conduct a survey and make a report to the President and the Congress, within two years of the enactment of this title, concerning the lack of availability of equal educational opportunities for individuals by reason of race, color, religion, or national origin in public educational institutions at all levels in the United States, its territories and possessions, and the District of Columbia.[28]

Prior to 1964, there was a vacuum of national data concerning the effects of poverty in public education. In 1964, the federal government commissioned James Coleman and his team of researchers to conduct a survey to satisfy the stipulation in Section 402. The product of this survey, *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, also referred to as the Coleman Report, found that educational quality was not only a matter of inputs, such as

[28] *Civil Rights Act of 1964*, Public Law 88-352, 88th Cong., 2nd sess., (2 July 1964), section 402.

textbooks and teachers' degrees, but also an issue of educational outputs, in terms of student achievement on standardized tests.[29] The results of this report alerted the government that giving public schools more money for educational resources was not the only determining factor for student achievement; race, socioeconomic status, and parent educational attainment directly correlated with a student's academic success.

The survey data from the Coleman Report challenged the federal government to utilize this social policy research in developing education and social policies to address the inequalities in educational achievement among Americans of lower social status. In the early 1970s, the Alum Rock voucher demonstration reflected the value that the government placed on social research results, as non-governmental research agencies administered surveys and educational assessments to determine the positive or negative effects of vouchers on the community.

The Economic Opportunity Act and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 intended to give all Americans an equal legal basis to participate in the nation's growing affluence and opportunities. In particular, the passage of the Economic Opportunity Act created programs to be "developed, conducted and administered with the maximum feasible participation of the residents of the areas and members of the groups it served."[30] Following the passage of this act, the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) was created as the key vehicle to oversee the War on Poverty programs of community action programs and social experiments. The Alum Rock Voucher Demonstration exhibited OEO's approach to addressing poverty through "formal research activities." According to Alice O'Connor,

> [OEO's] demonstration research program, which came to symbolize the agency at its most innovative and politically controversial, and which, in its efforts to bring the core concepts of community action to fruition, effectively transformed the very notion of demonstration research from a mechanism for small-scale experimentation into an instrument for direct, and in some cases immediate and large-scale, action.[31]

---

[29] James Coleman. *Equality and Achievement in Education*, (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1990), 1-2. This publication includes reprints of significant sections of Coleman's *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966).

[30] *Economic Opportunity Act*, Public Law 88-452, 88th Cong., 2nd sess., (20 August 1964).

[31] O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge*, 169-170.

While various groups questioned OEO's interest into the voucher system, the federal government's inability to create an antipoverty program cognizant of the educational inequalities between the rich and poor inspired OEO to consider any possible educational alternative. In 1969, when OEO first expressed interest in conducting a school voucher experiment for poor communities, social scientists immediately compiled data to create a basis for assessing the idea. The *Nation's Schools Journal* reproduced the results of a public school administrators opinion poll conducted in December 1970, reporting that eighty percent of administrators would *not* support a voucher tuition plan, and eighty-two percent would not favor such a plan in their district.[32] Alternately, the idea of vouchers had the potential to satisfy jointly educational progressives, such as Jencks, frustrated with the highly centralized public school system bureaucracy, as well as conservatives, like Friedman, unwilling to jeopardize individual choice or additional federal monies for the benefit of equally educating the masses.

OEO strived to create social reforms that would uplift the poor, without requiring drastic federal expenditures. In a 1969 statement, Nixon stressed the expansive role of OEO as a research and development agency (R&D), and redefined the administration's focus on "bold experimentation," and stressed the importance of "demonstration projects," intended to test and analyze the results of the experimental policies and programs. Specifically addressing education's role in OEO's reorganization, the Office of Program Development became responsible for "bringing" skill-based services, like youth education, to the poor.[33]

---

[32] "Four Opinion Polls," *Nation's Schools Journal*, in *Education Vouchers: From Theory to Practice in Alum Rock*, , ed. James Meckleburger, (Homewood, Illinois: ETC Publications, 1972), 54.

[33] Richard Nixon, "*A Statement on the Office of Economic Opportunity*, August 11, 1969," The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=2195&st=&st1=>, (12 November 2006).

Nixon's OEO would ideally test prospective policies, and implement those that provided the most promising opportunities for the poor.

The Nixon Administration believed that education still played a vital role in antipoverty policy, as universal academic achievement remained elusive in low-income and racially divided locales. In December 1969, while Nixon' was scrutinized for recent budget cuts in education, OEO made a grant to the Center for the Study of Public Policy (CSPP), in Cambridge, to explore the use of vouchers or grants to parents to finance elementary education, and produce a detailed study.[34] Christopher Jencks served as the co-director of CSPP and incorporated his thoughts on educational inequality, decentralization, and vouchers into his investigation of various voucher models. Although the country was performing better in education, public dissatisfaction with the public school system and the progress of disadvantaged children was higher than ever before.[35] CSPP would *not* simulate voucher systems in schools to achieve results, but explore the attributes and drawbacks of seven voucher models to see which, if any, could best be used in a demonstration experiment.

By 1970, President Nixon appointed former Illinois congressman Donald Rumsfeld to the joint post of OEO Director and Assistant to the President. Milton Friedman additionally joined Nixon's staff as a central economic advisor. Rumsfeld, a social moderate (at the time), believed that public education could be restructured through a variety of key ideas: responsiveness, competitiveness, flexibility, mobility, free choice, and variety.[36] Rumsfeld, who viewed vouchers as a viable means towards closing the

---

[34] U.S. Senate Select Committee on Equal Educational Opportunity. Equal Educational Opportunity Hearings. 92nd Cong., 1st sess., 1971., in *Education Vouchers*. ed. Meckleburger. 106.
[35] Glennan. "OEO Experiments...." ed. Meckleburger. *Education Vouchers*. 125-131.
[36] John Coyne Jr. "Slates and Hamsters." ed. Meckleburger. *Education Vouchers*, 79.

achievement gap between public schools in wealthier and lower income areas, was adverse to teacher organizations' refusal to accept such reforms because he believed that the education lobby largely "[feared] experimentation" and its potential to compromise the education bureaucracy's paychecks and benefits.[37]

In the spirit of Nixon's OEO strategy of "social pioneering," and mission for social programs to "take creative risks," director of the Office of Research and Evaluation and OEO spokesman, Thomas Glennan, announced OEO's upcoming release of CSPP's education voucher report.[38] As the first public statement of OEO on the voucher concept, Glennan attempted to quell controversy stemming from OEO's funding of *any* voucher model, given the historical uses of education grants. Furthermore, Glennan justified OEO's emphasis on education and interest in vouchers:

> I suppose no one would deny the need for reforms and change in education ...the nation's school system, public, private and parochial faces rising expectations on the part of many segments of the population concerning the performance of the schools. And, for no part of the population is this more true than for the poor and the disadvantaged who see the nation's school system as an essential contributor0 perhaps the main contributor – to the success of their children and an essential means for equalizing opportunity. But, in many instances, it appears that the school system is failing to meet these expectations.[39]

Glennan evaded establishing a concrete governmental position on vouchers, conveying OEO's willingness to consider controversial education experiments, in the hope for vouchers to offer innovative results, and instigate long-term changes in the nation's education system. Additionally, Glennan stipulated that OEO would only stage a voucher experiment with the "active and enthusiastic support of both the local superintendents of

---

[37] Ibid. 85.
[38] Richard Nixon, "A Statement on the Office of Economic Opportunity," 11 August 1969, The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php > (10 November 2007).; Thomas K. Glennan, "OEO Experiments in Education," in *Education Vouchers*, ed. Meckleburger, 125-131.
[39] Glennan, "OEO Experiments in Education," in *Education Vouchers*, ed. Meckleburger, 125.

ducation and boards of education...and of the local community action agency."[40] The nlarged educational bureaucracy posed obstinate opposition for funding a voucher easibility study. OEO hypothesized how giving unprecedented educational choice to parents of disadvantaged children would equalize educational opportunity, while the education establishment, including the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association, viewed any attention to school vouchers as a waste of time and money, threatening their institutional authority.[41]

The Voucher Report

In the summer of 1970, prior to the release of CSPP's *A Report on Financing Elementary Education by Grants to Parents*, OEO commissioned CSPP representatives to give presentations to most significantly economically disadvantaged school districts in the United States, discussing the opportunity to participate in an education voucher feasibility experiment.[42] At one of these presentations – at which Alum Rock Superintendent William Jefferds learned about the voucher program – CSPP's discussed the OEO-supported regulated compensatory voucher model. While CSPP explained that the OEO-supported model withheld the use of public funds to support private schools, and that the group operating the public school was eligible for public subsidies.[43] CSPP's arguments and

---

[40] Ibid., 131.

[41] David Selden, "Voucher Solution or Sop?," *National Schools Journal*, in *Education Vouchers*, ed. Meckleburger, 86.

[42] Sanford J. Glovinsky, *Final Report: Alum Rock Union Elementary School District Voucher Feasibility Study*, in *Education Vouchers*, ed. Meckleburger, 236.

[43] Christopher Jencks, A Preliminary Report on Financing Education by Payments to Parents, in Education Vouchers, ed. Meckleburger, 160.; The Supreme Court's decision in *Lemon v. Kurtzman* (1971)directly impacted the future course and composition of state-instituted voucher programs. The case called into question the use of public funds to be used to reimburse private and parochial schools for the cost of secular courses in Pennsylvania.the Supreme Court, in a majority decision written by Chief Justice Burger wrote that the systems in Pennsylvania and Rhode Island violated the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment, at

recommendations centered around the that belief parents – rich or poor – should be permitted to make decisions on their children's behalf, rather than submitting to the will of legislators, school boards, and educators. Ultimately, CSPP specified that in order for a qualified school district to warrant planning funds from OEO, it had to demonstrate the plan's ability "to improve the education of children, particularly disadvantaged children, and give parents, and particularly disadvantaged parents, more control over the kind of education their children get."[44]

The plan directly appealed to educational opportunities for the poor, and to create such a system, CSPP first emphasized, a reallocation of educational resources, and second, altering enrollment patterns in schools. The understanding behind these recommendations provided for significantly higher teacher quality, smaller classes, and increased preparation time for disadvantaged students. *Equal* treatment of the unequal would not suffice; a reformed education and/or voucher system must also entail a diversified student population to encourage intellectual growth through high expectations for all.[45] The regulated compensatory model adopted by OEO did not tack on additional fees for any participating student, but instead added a "compensatory" sum on top of the original amount for poorer children to make them more attractive to schools.

Although Jencks played a pivotal role in the voucher report, CSPP's report did not allude to mechanisms to increase teacher or parental autonomy in decision-making within the schools. Parents had the freedom to select their child's institution, after receiving the

---

which "government is to be entirely excluded from the area of religious instruction and churches excluded from the affairs of government." It held that "purchase of secular services" by religious institutions was unconstitutional, effectively eliminating the possibility of Jencks' unregulated voucher models enabling any parochial schools to solicit public aid included in *A Report on Financing Elementary Education by Grants to Parents.; Lemon v. Kurtzman*, 403 U.S. 602 (1971).

[44] Christopher Jencks, *A Preliminary Report on Financing Education by Payments to Parents*, in *Education Vouchers*, ed. Meckleburger,156.

[45] Ibid, 158.

information necessary to make educated decisions among schools.[46] While the Alum Rock voucher model provided clear structures to create more autonomy for principals, teachers, and the community, the only clear reference in the report to community participation suggested than an Education Voucher Agency (EVA). EVA would be delegated complete control over voucher administration, and selected upon their basis of representatives of the *community*, and possess an awareness of minority and majority concerns. The report did not specify how this board was to be established, but determined their authority in receiving, issuing, and dispersing the vouchers directly to families for approved voucher schools. Approved voucher schools were those who had agreed to accept the voucher as the full payment of tuition, any applicant as long as it had openings without discrimination, and abide by EVA and state requirements regarding students, staffing, and curriculum.[47]

While CSPP provided a logistical outline of how a school district could modify this system to suit the needs of their district, it could not have foreseen challenges and politics of conducting a voucher experiment. The formation of the voucher demonstration encompassed OEO's Nixon's stringent belief in social experimentation and Johnson's initial intention to uplift poor through education reform and "maximum feasible participation." Yet, neither OEO nor CSPP anticipated how Alum Rock could employ the federal voucher grant to remedy a budget deficit, and provide the means for Superintendent Jefferds to facilitate goals of decentralization and increased parental involvement.

[46] Ibid., 161-163.
[47] Ibid.

IV. The Alum Rock Voucher Plan

By 1972, Alum Rock was the first and *only* low-income school district in the country willing to move forward with developing a voucher proposal for the OEO. Even though CSPP presented the federal voucher plan to poor districts throughout the country, only five areas expressed interest in the experiment.[48] OEO-sponsored voucher feasibility studies in the communities of Gary, Indiana, Seattle, San Francisco, and New Rochelle, New York each rejected the idea, because they feared that "parental choice could lead to racial segregation, reluctance to serve as guinea pig for untested model, general decline of support for OEO initiatives by organized leaders of poor people, opposition by teacher organizations, and absence of state legislation that would permit private school participation."[49] ARUSD's decision to participate in the government's voucher demonstration was the product of OEO and Jefferds' optimism, desperation, and persistence.

OEO and Alum Rock administrators' hypothesized that engaging Alum Rock's disadvantaged parents in the process of freely selecting their children's school, a right traditionally reserved for more affluent families, would inspire greater parental involvement and increase student achievement. However, more than helping parents, economic incentives served as the driving force for Superintendent Jefferds and the Board of Trustees pursuit of the voucher grant. Although OEO marketed the voucher demonstration under the auspice of an antipoverty program, ARUSD's underlying focus on the financial, rather than the social benefits foreshadowed the inability for the voucher system to spark long-term changes in the district, and to ease the plight of Alum Rock's

---

[48] "Alum Rock Gets First Grant for Voucher System," *San Jose Mercury News*, 29 December 1970.
[49] Weiler, *A Public School Voucher Demonstration*, v.2, 3.

disadvantaged citizens. Although the poor Alum Rock community resembled the politics at play just a few years earlier in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, the demonstration coalesced decentralization, antipoverty policy, community participation with the equally divisive issues of vouchers and social experimentation. Ironically, each of these controversial topics shared the belief in the ability to produce palpable educational reform for disadvantaged students and families.

Alum Rock: A Legacy of Educational Reform

By 1970, following substantial urbanization during the 1950s and 1960s, Alum Rock experienced a period of economic and population stagnation. The community's racial breakdown consisted of: 48.8 percent Mexican-American, 12 percent African-American, 2.2 Asian-American, and 37 percent White/Caucasian.[50] According to 1970 census figures, Alum Rock's median income was $10,150, $2306 below the San Jose, and $582 below the statewide average income.[51] In the 1970s, the community had a transient rate of nearly thirty percent. Very few families were able to purchase their own homes. Of those residents falling below the poverty level, the majority were Mexican-Americans who lived in so-called barrios on Alum Rock south side. In contrast to the neglected and rundown barrios, middle-class Alum Rock residents of Alum Rock's rolling foothills – referred to as "hill people" – enjoyed brightly lit and newly paved streets.[52]

In September 1972, prior to the implementation of the voucher demonstration in six ARUSD schools, the school district accommodated 14,428 students in grades K-8. Three-fours of those students qualified for federally funded free lunches. Five of the six original

[50] U.S. Department of Commerce, *Census of Population and Housing* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1970).
[51] Weiler, *A Public School Voucher Demonstration*, v.1, 4.
[52] Ibid., 7-10.

voucher schools who participated in the first year of the demonstration were located in tracks with the lowest per-capita income within Alum Rock city limits. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the area lacked unified political organization amongst its large proportion of minority groups, without a single Mexican-American or African-American on either the Alum School Board or City Council.[53]

Although Alum Rock hosted the first federally funded voucher demonstration, as one of OEO's multiple social experiments, neither the national nor the local San Jose media found the experimental nature of the voucher program worthy of assigning specific reporters to track the entirety of the event. Whereas OEO contracted the Rand Corporation to be on site throughout the demonstration and provide an objective account and analysis of Alum Rock and vouchers, it failed to recount the local politics of educational reform in Alum Rock. The *San Jose Mercury News*'s fragmented coverage of significant events complicated the task of reconstructing local perceptions of the event, but nonetheless paints a vivid picture of Alum Rock in the 1970s.

While Rand reported nominal civil involvement of Alum Rock's minority population, the *San Jose Mercury News* chronicled the Chicano community's exploration of vehicles for educational reform and community-based initiatives. Beginning in 1968, the state awarded Alum Rock a grant for "Project Unidos" to finance the development of bilingual curriculums in district schools, and in October 1970, ARUSD received the first California school district grant from the Junior League of San Jose and the Mott Foundation to establish a "Community Schools Program" at two district schools.[54] The foundation invested $36,000 over the next three years for Alum Rock to build and facilitate

[53] Ibid., 19-25.

the program at Linda Vista Elementary and Mathson Middle School, which advocated family education, civic involvement, and community outreach centers.

During fall of 1970, Congress passed the first authorization of the *Elementary of Secondary School Act*, which allocated Title I grants to severely disadvantaged communities, such as Alum Rock. These funds permitted district elementary schools to implement new strategies of supplemental bilingual education for students in kindergarten and first grade. Teachers commented that the "community [had] been exceptionally receptive and supportive," as the district incorporated Spanish and English taught classes into early childhood curricula.[55] A few months later the California State Compensatory Educational Advisory Commission commended Alum Rock for their active parent involvement. Leo Lopez, serving as the associate superintendent for the California State Department of Education in 1970 reflected, "Alum Rock's parental involvement was one of the most 'heartwarming examples' in California."[56]

Despite Title I funds and community optimism, financial concerns mitigated real long and short-term changes in the district. Jefferds believed that the voucher plan coincided with the spirit of community participation in educational initiatives, while offering the district a sizeable federal grant to pursue OEO's policy. Simultaneously, Superintendent Jefferds endorsed a voucher feasibility study on grounds that the vouchers would redefine the role parents played in their children's education, and make Alum Rock's poor families privy to the same freedom to enjoyed by more affluent parents. Before the start of the 1970 school year, the Alum Rock school board unanimously

[55] "Interest is Bilingual," *San Jose Mercury News*, 20 December 1970.
[56] "Involvement of Alum Rock Parents Earns State Praise," *San Jose Mercury News*, 20 February 1971.

approved Jefferds' proposal to apply for an OEO grant and began investigating the community's attitude toward educational reform and participation in a voucher program.[57]

OEO required the district to conduct a feasibility study to gauge community and teacher support for a voucher demonstration to be awarded the voucher grant. Based on the results of the feasibility study, the district would decide whether or not to move forward and request additional OEO funding to produce a voucher proposal, and then develop an individualized voucher plan along the lines of the CSPP report. Upon receiving the grant, the ARUSD's governing body, the Santa Clara County Office of Education established the Center for Planning and Evaluation (CPE) as the research arm of the feasibility study. The Superintendent and Board of Trustees selected an Educational Voucher Committee (EVC) comprised of community representatives from public and private schools, minority groups, parents, and teachers. EVC designed and administered surveys to be taken by parents, district personnel, and teachers and organized public forums where the community could voice their concerns and pose questions about the prospective voucher experiment. The group also investigated the interest of parochial and non-denominational private schools in the program, the availability of space in neighboring districts, and the legal and technical questions presented by the voucher experiment.

Without any exemplary, or constitutional, voucher or tuition grant plans to emulate, the Alum Rock Board of Trustees selected EVC members they believed to be "visionary," and "representative" of the community's diverse "racial, ethnic, social, economic, occupational, and political" composition, similar to CSPP's EVA. The committee represented a wide variety of community interests, but did so unequally. Out of twenty-

[57]Weiler, *A Public School Voucher Demonstration*, v.3, 4.

three total committee members, the board appointed one Mexican-American to represent the Alum Rock's entire Mexican-American population; Alum Rock school board disproportionately occupied two seats.[58]

Beginning in March 1971, CPE and EVC conducted a series of public hearings to determine the general consensus of Alum Rock's community toward vouchers. A *San Jose Mercury News* reporter covering the March 24, 1971 hearing remarked on the "near unanimous opposition among the seventy-five people who attended the forum."[59] Those who attended the forums acknowledged the propensity for OEO's $3 million grant to eliminate ARUSD's financial crisis, but were not convinced of the universal benefits of vouchers. At the first forum, representatives from the Chicano organization Confederacion de la Raza, the Alum Rock Parent Association, and the California Teacher Association expressed skepticism in ARUSD's overt focus on the financial motives to approve the plan, and the potential for parental choice to facilitate segregation in their highly integrated town.

OEO, worried that the federal government's one last hope for the voucher demonstration was slipping way, deployed field agent Joel Levin to Alum Rock to garner support amongst minority groups, making personal visits to Chicano community organizations who resisted his efforts. Levin attended the remainder of these forums and attempted to quell community's uneasiness toward vouchers by reassuring them that vouchers targeted giving "poor and middle income families...equal freedom to choose schools as the wealthy."[60] Levin's generic response sounded as if it were pulled from the

[58] Ibid., v.1, 30-32.; Glovinsky, in *Education Vouchers*, ed. Meckleburger, 236-238.
[59] N.a. *San Jose Mercury News*. 24 March 1971.
[60] Ibid.

pages of OEO's playbook but embodied the removed and passive relationship between OEO and school administrators and the community.

To supplement community forums EVC distributed bilingual surveys and information pamphlets, including basic facts about education vouchers and simple inquiries into parental knowledge and interest in vouchers. Alum Rock's district staff and teachers received surveys, and EVC randomly selected classes to participate in the parent surveys. Students had just four days to bring home surveys (accompanied by short synopsis of the goal of the survey and instructions) for parents to complete and return to be calculated by EVC.

SPRING 1971 SURVEY OF ALUM ROCK PARENTS[61]
(Responses given in %)

QUESTION	YES	UNDECIDED	NO	Number of Respondents
I am well informed about the voucher plan	32	17	51	368
I would want my child to participate in this program	26	51	23	356
The voucher plan is a good idea for the district to explore	40	43	16	354
Parents should be the ones to decide what types of elementary school education their children should receive	57	24	20	351
The schools should try new ideas	76	18	6	355
The schools are not doing as well as they can	37	38	24	348

Despite skepticism from members of Alum Rock's large Chicano community, teacher organizations such as the National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers, and members of Congress, results from CPE's voucher survey of Alum Rock parents in April 1971 showed a nearly equal number of parents favoring the plan as opposed it. Yet, 51 percent were not well informed, and another seventeen percent

[61] Glovinsky, *Final Report...*, in *Education Vouchers*, ed. Meckleburger, 261-263.

reported to be undecided about their views of the voucher plan. Seventy-six percent of parents believed that schools should try new ideas, whereas only 40 percent of parents agreed that vouchers warranted further exploration, and only a quarter of parents wanted their children to participate in the program.[62] The evidence from the survey and forums suggested the community's ambiguity at best, if not outright opposition towards pushing forward plan.

Despite survey data, Jefferds determined that the results were not persuasive enough for Alum Rock to betray vouchers all together. The final report on the feasibility study submitted by ARUSD to the OEO discounted community opposition, and reported that "a strong favorable reaction to the concepts that underlie the proposed voucher plan," and that a substantial segment of the community did not have an opinion at the time of the survey.[63] The voucher feasibility studies in locations had rejected the concept, and seeing Alum Rock as its last hope to prove the viability of vouchers and the value of OEO's resources, approved a planning grant for Alum Rock to develop a voucher proposal. Within Alum Rock, social research data and the incentive of school administrators superseded the concerns vocalized by the community.

The Transitional Voucher Model Proposal

Like ARUSD, OEO refused to betray the voucher experiment, until it provided them with a basis for analysis, even if it meant making concessions with Alum Rock. OEO Director of Experimental Research, Jeffry Schiller, agreed to a fund a voucher demonstration in Alum Rock restricted to public schools, under the condition that key

[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid.

features of the CSPP voucher model were present in Alum Rock's design. Over the course of the negotiations Jefferds requested that the federal government support a program of "organizational development and managerial training" but the compromise was the "transitional voucher model."[64] The transitional component of the Alum Rock voucher model incorporated the traditional voucher concepts of parental choice of their children's schools, financed through a tuition grant from the government, but OEO required that it retain the fundamental components of CSPP's "regulated compensatory model."[65]

In January 1972, ARUSD received their second OEO grant to develop the transitional voucher proposal. CSPP's Joel Levin led fifty-five representatives of the voucher community and school interest groups over the course of a three-day conference at Santa Clara University to develop this plan. The group consisted of Alum Rock parents, principals of the six prospective voucher schools, the school district central staff, Parent Teacher Association representatives, members of the Alum Rock Teacher Association, and OEO staff. Nearly seventy percent of the children enrolled in the six participating voucher schools had Spanish surnames. Yet, only two appointed representatives of the Mexican-American community were selected to participate in the Santa Clara conference.[66]

Finding little interest from private schools, and without state enabling legislation, ARUSD proposed a limited voucher system in five Alum Rock elementary schools and one middle school. The participating schools would develop a minimum of two distinct programs to offer parents, replicating the educational marketplace originally presented in CSPP's model. Students were guaranteed admission to the mini-school of their choice, meaning that the more attractive the mini-school program seemed to parents, the more

---

[64] Weiler, *A Public School Voucher Demonstration*, v.3, 5.; v.1, 35.
[65] Weiler, *A Public School Voucher Demonstration*, v.2, 2.
[66] Ibid., v.2, 3.

voucher funds that school would receive to meet the increased student, teacher, and resource needs.

Jefferds, Levin, and their team, based their design on the theory that economic incentives would motivate mini-schools to compete for students, fulfilling the dual purpose of increasing teacher quality and boosting student achievement.[67] Mini-school teachers and principals experiences the unfamiliar autonomy over classroom curricula and the uses of compensatory vouchers funds, where sixty percent of program budgets purchased educational resources and materials, allowing teachers to experiment with different educational approaches, including taking children on field trips or the purchase of musical instruments. The more poor students enrolled at a given mini-school, the more money they had to spend on resources or activities related to the objectives stipulated by the mini-school.

In the proposal, Superintendent Jefferds' thoroughly described his aim of increasing parental involvement through school choice and stressed the pertinence of educating parents on the nature of the demonstration to enable "the effective operation of this pilot project." To implement this goal representatives at the Santa Clara Conference decided that an information agency, to be called the Education Voucher Advisory Committee (EVAC), comprised of one parent and staff representative from each voucher school. EVAC's proscribed role was to advise the school board and to safeguard the demonstration from becoming unrepresentative of the community's needs. The proposal indicated that despite the role of EVAC, the local school board had the final word regarding all district policies that could and would not be delegated. The proposal outlined the defined structure

[67] Ibid., v.1, xii-xiii.

of the school district, while still stressing the viability for community participation to influence district decision-making.

In regards to student placement, if parents selected a mini-school program located in a school outside their community the demonstration budgeted for free transportation to that school. Before the demonstration Alum Rock had never pursued a busing system both because of the high degree of existing integration in the schools and insufficient funds. Note, that the Alum Rock voucher model also included a component that offered parents unsatisfied with the given available "mini-school" programs the ability for organize with similar to develop their own alternative schools.[68]

The Alum Rock school board unanimously approved the transitional model created at the Santa Clara conference on April 12, 1972. On April 24, 1972, OEO's official announcement of the Alum Rock voucher demonstration included the various compromises between Alum Rock's model and the original CSPP plan, and contributed OEO's commitment and approval to Alum Rock's "strong support for the voucher system."[69] The federal government pledged five to seven years of initial support if the school district committed to continuing and expanding the demonstration to at least 8,000 students following the September 1972 through June 1973 school term. For the purpose of this study, the key features of the approved Alum Rock *Transitional Model Voucher Proposal* included:

- The demonstration was restricted to public school, and six of the twenty-four Alum Rock Union School District Schools would participate in the first year of the plan.

---

[68] ARUSD, *Transitional Voucher Proposal*, in *EducationVouchers*,ed. James Meckleburger, 314-315.
[69] The Office of Economic Opportunity, "A Proposed Demonstration in Education Vouchers," 24 April 1972.

- Each school was required to have at least two or more distinct program options, called "mini-schools," to offer to parents. "Squatters' rights" for parents of children already attending a certain school would be enforced. [70]
- The district provided a basic voucher from its current income and OEO was responsible for the compensatory voucher assessed to students eligible for federally funded free lunch, as defined by the requirements in Title I of the *Elementary and Secondary Schools Act* of 1965.
- The Alum Rock school board and superintendent were in charge of the demonstration; EVAC was created to advise administrators in decisions.
- The district contracted with the Sequoia Institute, a nonprofit corporation formed to provide administrative services throughout the demonstration, such as assisting in the set-up, internal evaluation, and parental counseling of the voucher program.[71]

In terms of the compensatory voucher for poor students, OEO hoped that the extra an additional sum would make poor students economically more attractive to voucher schools, and in the Alum Rock case, to encourage "mini-school" programs to develop programs to meet the needs of their students. In Alum Rock, compensatory vouchers were budgeted within the federal grant, and the additional sums accompanying disadvantaged students was to be used at the discretion of the specific mini-school where the child was enrolled for that year.[72]

In the voucher proposal created for OEO, Jefferds and Levin indicated that surveys of parents, teachers, and administrators "indicated a significant level of support" for vouchers, and furthermore that "it was difficult to assess the community's opinion [on the voucher plan]" from the community forums.[73] Although the proposal misrepresented the true sentiments of community support for vouchers in order to receive the OEO grant,

---

[70] "Squatters' rights" can be defined as the right for "students attending a given school, and their younger siblings, [to be] guaranteed the right to continue attending that school." This additional compromise made at the Santa Clara Conference was issued to pacify many apprehensive Alum Rock parents: in Wieler, *A Public School Voucher Demonstration*, v.1, xxxv.

[71] Ibid., v.1, 3.

[72] Ibid., v.4, 7-11.

[73] ARUSD, *Transitional Voucher Proposal*, in *Education Vouchers*, ed. Meckleburger, 282.

according to the proposal, the program would create mechanisms for Alum Rock's already involved parents to exert greater autonomy in their children's education. With the first OEO demonstration grant ARUSD received the $2 million dollars to cover the costs of the first two years of the demonstration. Jefferds and the school board cunningly obtained ARUSD's voucher grant, which conveyed the ability for financial stability to make way for decentralization and community involvement.

The school district agreed to apply CSPP's conditions in the voucher experiment, without demonstrating concrete evidence that the community would meet OEO's expectation for vouchers to improve the education of the disadvantaged in order to begin "closing the gap between the advantaged and disadvantaged."[74]

But the school district could only pay the poor and the federal government lip service for so long – published reports revealed the minimal propensity for vouchers to equalize educational achievement even amongst voucher and non-voucher students, calling into question the real purpose of the federal funds. Little by little, Chicano community applied more pressure on the school board to provide explanation of how the money was being spent to improve student achievement and promote parental involvement. Within five months of OEO's approval of the voucher model, the voucher staff and the Superintendent worked to convert six basic elementary and middle schools into voucher schools from a district system that had been developing for over four decades.

[74] Jencks, *A Report on Financing Elementary Education...*, in *Education Vouchers*, ed. Meckleburger, 156.

V. Implementing the Voucher Model

The OEO grant allocated $2 million to cover the costs of compensatory vouchers, a voucher staff, internal evaluation, busing, and parental counseling. The district awarded the Sequoia Institute a four-year contract worth $256,169 to provide administrative services for the demonstration, and act as the "voucher staff." The district established the Sequoia Institute strictly for the Alum Rock demonstration, and directly after OEO awarded ARUSD the grant Superintendent Jefferds named Joel Levin Voucher Project Director. Superintendent Jefferds selected Levin over qualified community leaders on the rationale that his external relationship with the community would enable the demonstration to be run objectively. To avoid greater scrutiny from Chicano organizations, Jefferds appointed two Mexican-Americans as the Sequoia Institute's parent-communication administrator and information-dissemination administrator.

Following OEO approval of Alum Rock's voucher model, mini-school principals and teachers worked with the Sequoia Institute to develop mini-school programs within their voucher school. Participating schools had just one month to produce brief, one-page descriptions and objectives for their mini-school programs, which were then compiled in a bilingual pamphlet and distributed to parents in the neighborhoods of voucher schools. Levin and the voucher staff worked with the appointed professional and parent counselors to clearly communicate Alum Rock's new voucher system in, "What is a Voucher?/¿Que is un Certificado? (certificado de fondos para educar niños)," and mini-school options and explanations in "Education Alternatives for Your Child."[75] Voucher parents selected from one of twenty-two minis schools, of which eleven programs emphasized general basic

academic skills, three specific basic skills (two reading and one math/science), two fine arts programs, two cultural diversity programs, and four "activity centered" which taught basic skills through everyday activities.[76]

In May 1972, following the distribution of introductory voucher information to Alum Rock parents, Ricardo Valdez spoke on behalf of Chicano parents threatening to boycott the Alum Rock schools if the district's curriculum department did not appoint more minority representatives to the Board of Trustees, and in turn be more sensitive to the needs of the community. Low student achievement scores embarrassed the school district, but also disheartened parents who believed that their children deserved more than what the district was willing to invest in their education. Valdez represented the Chicano community's frustration with the authority wielding Board of Trustees; despite the high percentage of Mexican-American students, the district did not allocate sufficient time and resources for creating more bilingual programs, which stressed reading and writing in Spanish.[77]

Mini-school programs reflected the concern for Chicano education initiatives, but the group as a whole remained underrepresented throughout the demonstration. The intentions and actions of the school board and Sequoia Institute continued to contradict themselves. The school board and staff director Joel Levin championed the voucher system's potential to encourage parental choice that would positively ripple down throughout the entire community, but their unwillingness to allow less affluent community members to penetrate into their inner circle thwarted long-term changes in the ARUSD. During the early 1970s, the *San Jose Mercury News* gave the Chicano

[76] Weiler, *A Public School Voucher Demonstration*, v.2, 21-23.
[77] N.a. *San Jose Mercury News*, 22 May 1972.; This article was included in the microform clippings file at the Dr. Martin Luther King Library in San Jose, Calif. The title had been cut off.

community a voice that was denied by the district staff and Board of Trustees; Alum Rock's Mexican-American community indefinitely remained marginalized without elected or appointed representation.

Within the short period of May 20th–June 8th, the Sequoia Institute and parental counselors distributed voucher information pamphlets, and attempted to inform and counsel parents on the new options for their children before submitting their selections. Being hard-pressed for time, many parents were offered little to no advice on selecting a mini-school for their child, contributing to Rand's finding that a dismal seventeen percent of voucher parents had not heard of the voucher demonstration by November 1972. In July 1972 the Alum Rock Union School District received 2756 of a possible 4000 voucher applications and mini-school selections from district parents.[78]

First Year Results

In the 1960s and 1970s, the federal government gauged the success of social experiments on the experiment's production of quantifiable results. In Washington, the Nixon administration emphasized the importance of analytic, cost/benefit evaluation in antipoverty policies, indicating the federal government's trend toward "[settling] society's problems through computation."[79] Rand realized the Alum Rock demonstration presented a departure from their traditional methodology for evaluating untested policies. In the first year of the voucher program Rand observed 103 of 122 mini-school classrooms, in twenty-two mini-school programs at six schools.

[78] N.t. *San Jose Mercury News*, 14 July 1972.
[79] O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge*, 188-189.

The first year of implementation in any policy or educational experiment seldom produces discernable results, and Alum Rock was no exception to the rule. Within Rand's first year report on Alum Rock, study director Daniel Weiler preceded his analysis of first year data by explaining the trouble the district and voucher agencies encountered before implementation even began. The limited six-week planning period and variance in mini-school decision-making and implementation mitigated the decisiveness of Rand's results.[80]

A minimal number of conflicts arose throughout the first year. Those which primarily concerned the inadequate flow of information to parents from school staff and counselors, and tensions between the Sequoia Institute and school personnel, and mini-school teachers and principals. Alum Rock's voucher proposal to OEO declared:

> The community will participate actively in the operation and governance of the...demonstration. Individual schools and programs will encourage parental participation at a meaningful level in their respective decision making processes.[81]

By the end of the first year, the parents Rand polled for their evaluation expressed a desire to have a more audible voice in curriculum planning. Even though a number of parents set up advisory committees, parents wielded no formal authority.[82] Rand survey results of parents during the first year of the demonstration indicated that 65.4 percent of parents felt that the school system had done a "good" or "very good" job in explaining the inter-workings of the program.[83] Mexican-Americans expressed greater *dissatisfaction* with the system than White respondents. In fall of 1972, Rand's inquiry into parental awareness of the voucher demonstration reported that 22 percent of English speaking

---

[80] Weiler, *A Public School Voucher Demonstration*, v.2, 7.
[81] Ibid., 18.
[82] Ibid., 19.
[83] Ibid., v.4, 90.

Mexican-American parents and 33 percent of Spanish speaking Mexican-American parents had *not* heard of the program, versus just 10 percent of White parents.[84] By the following fall more than 90 percent of both English and Spanish- speaking Mexican-American said that they were aware of the voucher program, while only 44 percent of Spanish speaking parents knew the mini-school program where their child enrolled.

Despite the lofty expectations for the Educational Voucher Advisory Committee in the voucher proposal, EVAC played a minor role in counseling parents on selecting a school for children, especially for children of parents without a high school degree. Rand's interviews and observations of parental involvement found that there was not a significant increase in parental participation in school governance. They attributed parents' apparent apathy to an insignificant push to acquire such power, influenced by the parents' lack of education, time, and organizational experience, and their traditional pattern of letting professionals assume educational leadership.[85] Rand's generalizations implied a sense of ambivalence among Alum Rock parents toward the voucher system.

From a national perspective, the first year in Alum Rock did not demonstrate that vouchers had any pervasive effect on improving the opportunities and achievement of disadvantaged families. Although teachers and principals experienced increased autonomy, they were not instructed as to relegate portions of that new authority to voucher parents. The district failed to institute the right mechanisms to achieve its goal of increasing community participation, and then blamed the parents for not playing an instrumental role in their children's education. The experimental design of vouchers began to resemble failed community action programs during the War on Poverty: they created "opportunities"

[84] Ibid., v.1, 120.
[85] Ibid., v.1, 74-75.

for the poor in theory, but in practice ignored the voice of disadvantaged participants. By taking the report at face value, the voucher report showed that parents had been given the freedom to choose their child's school, but little other power.

The first year at Alum Rock did not confirm fears from voucher critics that parental choice would increase school segregation by race or class. The only increase in ethnic segregation occurred at mini-schools emphasizing multicultural education experienced a slightly higher enrollment of Mexican-American students, which focused on English and Spanish reading and writing skills.[86] Mini-school programs such as Miller Elementary School's, "Multi-Cultural Program" stressed diversity in education, and included a cultural studies class taught by community members, as well as food tasting and folk dancing. Similar programs appealed to the interests of Alum Rock parents, but did not demonstrate how this system could develop into an antipoverty program.[87]

The Rand report revealed the limited success of ARUSD in achieving the aims of the voucher demonstration from 1972-1973, including the decentralization of decision making for principals and mini-school teachers, the ability for parents to choose a mini-school for their children. Overall, parents and teachers expressed satisfaction with the number of options for students, but most parents expressed their satisfaction with the system prior to the intervention of vouchers. Judging from Rand's bland analysis, Alum Rock was not poised to be the stomping grounds of an educational revolution, but a salient example in the politics of educational reform. The combination of unpersuasive technical analysis and limited changes in school operations raised the community's concerns about the district's motives for continuing the demonstration. The Southwest

[86] Ibid., v.1, 128-130, 183-184.
[87] Ibid., v.4, 85.

Network intervened on behalf of the Alum Rock community, determined to get the inside scoop on the voucher system and expose the community's realistic perceptions of the demonstration.[88]

VI. The Alum Rock Experience: 1973-1976

The Southwest Network Takes on Vouchers

Armando Valdez created the Southwest Network while pursing his doctorate in education at Stanford University in 1971. Valdez, participating in community organizing as an undergraduate at San Jose State University in the 1960s, had become cognizant of East San Jose's impoverished and underprivileged population. Based on his research and writings on educational alternatives for the Chicano community, a Nebraska educational outreach agency approached Valdez and offered him the opportunity to work with funds from the U.S. Office of Education to investigate alternative methods of mobilizing parents. Having recently finished his doctoral coursework, Valdez accepted the position and used the funding to create the Southwest Network "to gather, disseminate, and facilitate information sharing regarding Chicano educational programs."[89] In a recent interview with Valdez, he recounted his experience in Alum Rock, reflecting his first hand encounters both with voucher staff, teachers, and community organizers.

In 1972, the Alum Rock Parent Association and young teachers, frustrated with ineffective district policies, sought out an organization to help them challenge the ARUSD school board and develop more effective teaching methods. The Alum Rock PTA caught wind of the Southwest Network's emphasis on Chicano community uplift and innovation

[88] Ibid., v.2, vii, 25-26.
[89] Southwest Network, *This Pamphlet Shows How the Parents and the Community*...., 47.

and asked for its help. The PTA president, a Chicano without a college education but a deep passion for improving the education standard of education in Alum Rock, approached the Southwest Network for assistance. He informed Valdez that despite making appearances at school board meetings to petition the implementation of district curriculums reflective of the needs of the Chicano community, the board repeatedly ignored his requests. By the fall of 1972, the Southwest Network began work on behalf of Alum Rock's Chicano community, hoping to legitimize claims of injustice with eyewitness evidence.

Valdez learned that Alum Rock student achievement ranked at the "rock bottom" compared with the *entire* country, even though Alum Rock teachers earned a significantly higher salary than many other California public school districts. He felt that ARUSD's principals and administrators sub-par leadership skills caused low-student achievement more than the district's dismal financial situation. Given these conditions, Valdez claimed that Alum Rock was the "only district desperate enough to try the [voucher demonstration]," and this motivated him to supplement the community with information reflective of their needs.[90]

Alongside the Sequoia Institute and the Rand Corporation, the district agreed for the Southwest Network to observe voucher schools during the first two years of the demonstration and interview willing teachers, parents, and administrators. Valdez criticized the lack of institutional will of the external agencies involved in the demonstration, who felt no responsibility to the community, but received sizeable paychecks for running the project. According to Valdez, his involvement with the voucher demonstration confirmed his belief that that the administration had economic incentives to keep failing: as

[90] Armando Valdez, phone interview with author, San Jose, California. 1 March 2007.

educational alternatives failed, the district, already top-heavy in administrative funding, continued to receive federal and state funding until students made academic gains.[91]

Based on the information the Southwest Network collected from December 1973 through March 1974 the organization produced a bilingual publication entitled, *This Pamphlet Shows How the Parents and the Community Were Deceived by the Alum Rock Voucher Programs*. Southwest Network members distributed the pamphlets inform and galvanize the Chicano community, inspiring more Mexican-Americans to make educated challenges to the school voucher program.

The forty-seven-page pamphlet revealed a different side of the Alum Rock voucher program. Two fictional narrators named Don Garrapata and Canicas told the story of the voucher demonstration from the perspective of the Chicano community, for the Chicano community. Valdez and his team summarized the history and progress of the Alum Rock Voucher Demonstration until winter 1974, emphasizing contradictions between the transitional voucher proposal and the reality behind its implementation, with regard to parental choice and involvement.

Unlike the Rand assessments, the Southwest Network focused on the grassroots perspectives of the Alum Rock community and incorporated the opinions of their interview subjects into the pamphlet. The subjects were omitted, but their comments spoke volumes about suspected ulterior motives of district administrators. The pamphlet revealed that Alum Rock neglected OEO's intention for a community advisory group to supplement the decision-making processes of the School Board, and give suggestions on methods to improve the performance of the demonstration. In reality the Southwest Network and Rand

[91] Ibid.

found that only one-third of all mini-schools contained parental advisory committees and the Educational Voucher Advisory Committee rarely participated in the demonstration.[92]

A district administrator remarked that, "Alum Rock was fortunate to get the voucher because of the money, but school goes on basically the same, with no increase in achievement." The Southwest Network included candid responses from parents who conveyed their frustration with the apparent precedence the district gave to pumping voucher monies into the schools, rather than implementing systems to improve children's education. Community reflections revealed that parents blamed the school board for inhibiting community participation, because they felt "the School Board [ignored] parents if the Board [didn't] agree with parents."[93]

Although he government and district created the Education Voucher Advisory Committee (EVAC) as a sounding board for the Board of Trustees and voucher staff, EVAC's sources were never utilized. The Southwest Network reported that EVAC, the only community organization designed as a control to voucher administration, had a $21,000 budget during the first two years, but never obtained the group-process training skills or assistance to be effective community advocates. Furthermore, EVAC did not even know that their budget apportioned $14,000 to hold meetings with community organizations. In the second year, EVAC failed to counsel parents on mini-school programs and distribute information pamphlets, which helped explain why one out of ten children had not been placed in a mini-school by the first day of classes.[94]

The Southwest Network scrutinized Alum Rock's use of federal funds, involving the large amounts funneled to the district administration, independent research agencies,

---

[92] The Southwest Network, *This Pamphlet...*, 16; Weiler, *A Public School Voucher Demonstration*, v.1.
[93] Southwest Network, *This Pamphlet Shows...*, 2.
[94] Ibid., 18, 26.

and voucher staff, as well as he in-staff training budget, and, and most importantly the in-staff training budget. After two years, teachers and school staffs had not attended in-service training programs for which the grant budgeted $180,000, and in addition to unused funds stipulated for parental counseling.[95] By demonstrating the multitude of unutilized voucher funds, the Southwest Network strived to motivate the Chicano community to demand more participation in district decision making, or create schools of their own, making use of $60,000 to create community-initiated schools themselves. Valdez's work to mobilize the community to pursue their own educational alternatives demonstrated the Southwest Network's antagonistic attempts to free Alum Rock's Chicano families from subjugation under the school board's centralized authority and misappropriation of valuable funds.

Vouchers in the Classroom: Reflections on Mini-School Implementation

Margie Kensit, a second year teacher at Alum Rock's Fischer Middle School in 1973, recalled that the voucher program enabled her to exercise power than she ever could have envisioned as a woman fresh out of San Jose State University. Looking beyond Rand's statistics on teacher and parent satisfaction, Kensit recalled the arrival of vouchers at Fischer as initially tumultuous, but eventually rewarding and educational for parents, teachers, and students. Since Fischer Middle School transitioned to a voucher school during the second year of the demonstration, school administrators gave the entire staff the option of resigning or transferring to the newly built – non-voucher- Ocala Middle School if they opposed the plan. Unlike more than half of the staff that left Fischer before the beginning of the 1973 fall term, Kensit, following the lead of her mentor, a teacher named

[95] Ibid., 40.

Blum, stayed at Fischer and worked with Blum to design their own mini-school program. Fischer was one of the most dilapidated schools in the district, and lacked an adequate principal or administration to encourage solidarity amongst the staff to make the most of the school's large debt.

In 1973, Fischer opened four mini-schools. Kensit and Blum's program "Open-Level Learning" attracted sixty students in the first year and focused on general education, in commingled grade environments. "Open-Level Learning" enrolled a high proportion of students who qualified for the compensatory voucher, significantly increasing Kensit's discretionary funding. In retrospect, Kensit considered the stark contrast between the 1972 and 1973 school years surreal; she went from having little authority over the curriculum to single-handedly warding the decision-making authority to purchase National Geographic globes, complete sets of new textbooks, and even a portable classroom to teach elective classes. Kensit's early experiences in Alum Rock exposed her "how poor was." The influx of educational resources offered Alum Rock students amenities that would not have existed, were it not for voucher funds.

Throughout the next three years Kensit's mini-school sustained an average of sixty students, who exhibited enthusiastic participation and attendance during the demonstration. Nearly all of these students stayed in her classroom until they reached high school. Kensit's students nominal achievement was so below the national norm for their age group that rather than basing student gains on assessment tests parents attended "student-led conferences" in order to educate parents of children's academic successes and failures, and update them on what the students were learning. Kensit, part of a small group of individuals who remained with the Alum Rock Union School District since the 1970s,

believes that the high level of classroom autonomy provided by the voucher experiment fostered academic progress and parental involvement, even if data proved otherwise.[96]

Unfortunately, not all voucher teachers shared Kensit's benevolent experience. The increased level of teacher autonomy and trust between teachers and families also had its detriments. By the May 25,1973 voucher selection deadline, parents of nearly 300 Alum Rock students placed Mayfield School's "Learning Tree" mini-school as their first choice program. "Learning Tree" was poised to be the first site in the nation to have offered a phonics-based reading program, permitting a child to start reading as early as kindergarten.

In late August, just two weeks prior to the start of classes, Mayfield's principal, with approval from the trustees, made the decision to transfer Learning Tree's creator Bob Lurton out of the school. Parents of Learning Tree students and fellow teachers were outraged. They viewed the principal's decision as a blatant violation of the voucher concept, as parents and teachers selected the program based on Lurton's leadership and teaching. Parents felt as though the district misled them in its promise that there first choice would be fulfilled, contingent on the description in the voucher information pamphlet. They were additionally frustrated with the possibility of the additional six "Learning Tree" teachers living up to their threat to quit unless Mayfield's principal reinstated Lurton, and the students were subsequently placed in mini-schools with openings, rather than accommodating their second or third choice school.[97]

The principal, trustees, and superintendent did not submit to the teacher and parents' ultimatums to rehire Lurton, and 300 students were placed in their second and

---

[96] Margie Kensit, interview with author. 28 February 2007. Alum Rock, Calif.. Alum Rock Union Elementary School District Office. Alum Rock..

[97] "Transfer Snags Voucher Plan at Mayfield School." *San Jose Mercury News*. 24 August 1973.; "'Learning Tree' – 3 Days to Live." *San Jose Mercury News*. 31 August 1973.

third choice programs, based on available spots.[98] Jefferds defended the administration's decision on grounds that, "Parents signed up for a philosophy and we intend to keep the program in line with philosophy." Parents felt that it reflected the district's lack of commitment to Alum Rock parents. The closure of the "Learning Tree" mini-school marked the first *public* controversy over the implementation process. The story of the Alum Rock voucher program continued to follow the trend that began upon Jefferds' attendance of the CSPP presentation: Jefferds and the Board of Trustees would pursue their own goals, regardless of the cost to the Alum Rock community.[99]

The Second through Fourth Years: Goodbye OEO, Hello National Institute of Education

The Office of Economic Opportunity approved an additional $1.8 million to finance the second year of the voucher demonstration, even though the Alum Rock demonstration had not produced any tangible evidence of its effectiveness within Alum Rock. The superintendent, Board of Trustees, and OEO poured a great deal of pride, time, and funding into the creation of the voucher demonstration and hoped that student assessment results would validate their hefty investments. The Rand Corporation did not publish its report on the first year of the demonstration until 1974, and the government used examples of the low-key and minimal number of *publicized* conflicts and district requests to incorporate the voucher system as an indicator of the general satisfaction of the school and parental communities.

---

[98] Based on my research of the "Learning Tree" mini-school controversy, no sources gave an explanation as to why Bob Lurton was transferred out of Mayfield. Those interested in learning more about this event can be directed to the *San Jose Mercury News'* clippings files at the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Library, in San Jose, California.

[99] "Transfer Snags Voucher Plan at Mayfield School," 24 August 1973.; "'Learning Tree' – 3 Days to Live," 31 August 1973.

Throughout the 1973-1974 three additional middle schools and two elementary schools adopted the transitional voucher model, accommodating a total of 9000 students, which fell right within OEO's targeted range for the second year expansion. The number of mini-school programs expanded from twenty-two to forty-five, granting parents the choice of additional programs to suit the needs of children's needs. The voucher staff encouraged parents to select a school specifically suited for their child, and subsequently utilize the monies budgeted for busing and transfers. Principals and teachers embraced their new financial freedom, and liberally purchased items for their students.[100]

Before the second year of the demonstration Alum Rock's relationship with OEO officially ended, and the demonstration fell under the auspices of the newly established National Institute of Education (NIE). In April 1973, President Nixon dismantled OEO, and incorporated OEO's most effective and sustainable programs into other federal agencies. NIE absorbed educational experiments and on-going feasibility studies run with OEO funding, such as the Alum Rock Voucher Demonstration. President Nixon appointed Thomas Glennan, OEO's former spokesman, as the first director of the National Institute of Education. Having served as OEO's director for the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation and spokesman during the early days of the voucher controversy, Glennan continued to view the Alum Rock experience as a valuable federal investment, with the potential of producing groundbreaking results. [101]

In April 1974, in light of an anticipated slash in federal funding for research experiments, Glennan announced that the voucher experiment was in jeopardy of losing funding. Over the course of 1970 through 1974, the federal government poured $6.9

---

[101] N.t. *San Jose Mercury News*, 18 August 1974.

million into the project, and data and observations could not prove any sustainable benefits of vouchers on the well being of disadvantaged students. In May 1974, Assistant NIE Director Denis Doyle announced that the Alum Rock project, based on the federal government's "profound moral commitment," would retain full funding through June 30, 1975.[102] The Board of Trustees possessed a moral commitment to retaining funding for the district, even though the community grew more suspicious of where all of the funds went.

After four years community organizations challenged the Alum Rock Board of Trustees with legal action because of its alleged corruption and prolonged misuse of tax dollars to finance the demonstration. The Southwest Network threatened the board with a taxpayers suit unless the school board could provide a breakdown of how and where the board had spent the voucher funding, and student achievement data from the previous school year. The suit embodied Valdez's last attempt to expose the board's fraudulent commitment to the voucher experiment. Yet the Southwest Network never pursued a legal challenge on behalf of the community. Ironically, Valdez's agency had to file for bankruptcy in their attempts to finance the suit against the board.[103] Community organizers continued its efforts to hold the board accountable for failing to allow the community to participate in decision-making.

The End of the Demonstration: Mini-Schools Shut Their Doors

The Alum Rock School District officially began phasing out vouchers in June 1976. Superintendent Jefferds petitioned the Board of Trustees to implement to retain several important facets of the program, such as open enrollment and busing. Later that year the

[102] Ibid.
[103] Armando Valdez, phone interview with author.; "Suit Threatened in School Voucher Program," *San Jose Mercury News*, 28 May 1975.

California State Legislature scheduled to vote on a measure which would equalize education funding to all California school districts. If the legislation passed, Jefferds intended to use the additional monies to fund a full voucher system in the district's public schools.[104] The referendum was defeated and the district proceeded with the process of dismantling the mini-school programs, and reintegrating mini-school teachers and staff under one principal. Teacher Margie Kensit's frustration with the voucher program came during the phase out. The district quickly reverted to its ineffective governing system, stripping teachers of the autonomy and financial discretion they enjoyed in their mini-schools. The innovative multi-cultural and multi-grade programs did not survive the phase out, angering minority parents who more readily recognized the limited options offered within the district schools.

In 1976, the parental advocacy group United Front, with the backing of several Chicano organizations, confronted the Alum Rock Board of Trustees on their financial corruption and unrepresentative policy making, proposing a recall of all five board members.[105] The United Front revisited the Southwest Network's claim that the Board of Trustees needed to be replaced with members representative of the community's needs. Like the Southwest Network, the United Front believed that the school board needed to be held accountable for failing to institute structural changes to remedy low student performance. The board had become increasingly despotic over the voucher years, and while the voucher demonstration advocated decentralized decision making, they refused to concede any power. The community protested to no avail, but remained active in the community's schools long after the voucher demonstration.

---

[104] "Voucher Funds to be Phased Out," *San Jose Mercury News*, 25 April 1975.
[105] "Alum Rock Parents Start Recall Against Board of Trustees," *San Jose Mercury News*, 12 May 1976.

Joel Levin's final report on the last two years reflected the district's evaluation of the end of the demonstration. In the third and fourth years student enrollment began to decrease, but contrastingly the district finally began to invest time in the development of the EVAC and the parental counseling program.[106] Unfortunately, the district's interest in these programs came too late. In alliance with the superintendent and school board's commitment to in-service training of parental counselors in the *Transitional Voucher Proposal*, the Sequoia Institute focused on encouraging parental counseling development beginning in the third year of the demonstration. Eliot Levinson, in his Rand Corporation report on the final operations in Alum Rock, interpreted the district's belated interest in parental information and consultation as part of its incremental approach to the voucher system. He theorized that the complete operation of the voucher system did not occur simultaneously, but in stages. Whether it was a coincidence or not, the notion of parent choice was immediately initiated, but parent information, budgeting, and participation remained parts of latter stages of implementation.[107]

Levin's official district report assigned complications in implementing parent-focused programs to NIE's rebudgeting, and the beginning stages of the voucher phase out. He discussed that in 1975 parent counselors and the Sequoia Institute's Coordinator of Parent Counseling "emerged with a new identity...to establish a parent education program." Levin reported that the parent counselors had trouble effectively executing their role, as they felt disrespected by the Superintendent, Project Director (Levin) and NIE, while simultaneously developing a strong and receptive community constituency. The

---

[106] Joel Levin, *Final Report on Third and Fourth Year Operations of the Alum Rock Voucher Project*, (San Jose, California: Sequoia Institute, 1976), 2, 17-19.
[107] Eliot Levinson, *The Alum Rock Voucher Demonstration: Three Years of Implementation*, (Santa Monica, California: Rand Corporation, 1976), 14-19.

Coordinator of Parental Counseling resigned later that year, and the district was not inclined to hire an individual to fill the position.[108] The budget previously allocated to parental counseling and similarly to EVAC fell to the cutting room floor as NIE began to slow Alum Rock funds. Though Levin underscored the conflict between administrative and community participation, Alum Rock parents did not hesitate to express their chagrin when provoked.

While the Southwest Network attempted to draw attention to the suspicious inter-workings of the district during the beginning stages of implementation, NIE began to question possible budgetary inconsistencies of the voucher program only when it began to cut back on funds for the entire agency. The budget crisis, which ultimately ensued, brought an official end to the Alum Rock voucher project and the peaceable relationship between the federal government and Alum Rock voucher administrators.

During a meeting between NIE and Alum Rock staff members regarding budget consolidation, the school district proposed that district staff member salaries be centralized alongside mini-school personnel hired under the federal voucher grant. NIE agreed to this proposition understanding that mini-school personnel at the school level were benefiting from this agreement – not the district staff. Levin's final report arguably described that the conflict between NIE and Alum Rock was "still a subject of debate" in 1976, but explained that NIE alleged that "there had been a deliberate duplicity on the part of the district, and that the district had purposely made an effort to dupe NIE."[109] As a result, NIE froze the $1.5 million in voucher funds for the fiscal year unless Alum Rock complied with the federal directive to reallocate funding to mini-school staff. Superintendent Jefferds had

[108] Levin, *Final Report...*, 14, 17.
[109] Ibid., 29.

orchestrated the voucher system to fit the district's fiscal crises since 1971. By 1975, however, NIE gained the upper hand on the district's prolonged policy making monopoly. Faced with bankruptcy, the trustees and Superintendent had no choice but to comply with the NIE.[110]

The friction that began with the community and district administrators, and trickled down to teachers, principals, and voucher staff, and finally emerged between NIE and Alum Rock's head honchos marked the substantial decrease in voucher funding and the phasing out of many crucial components of the nation's first voucher demonstration. Alum Rock received minimal federal funds to operate select components of the voucher system until June 1976, upon which the Board of Trustees and Superintendent voted on elements of the model they wished to institutionalize within the district.

[110] Ibid., 30.

VII. Conclusion

In Alum Rock, the intertwining of various social, political, and economic factors complicated the formation and implementation of the voucher system. The school district's leadership and its betrayal of the community's desires inhibited the success of the voucher system and the grassroots leadership from Alum Rock's emerging Chicano community. Educational alternatives, aimed specifically at uplifting the Mexican-American demographic were present before Jefferds' quest for the voucher grant in 1970. Simple freedom of choice plans, such as those implemented in Prince Edward County, Virginia sought to accommodate community members already represented those invested with policy making power. The concept of educational reform for disadvantaged Americans developed during the War on Poverty, with community action programs designed to "uplift" the poor, by offering individuals in low-income communities a "hand-up, not a hand-out."[111] Community action lived on in Alum Rock, although politicians and school leaders resisted extending their hands in the direction of the poor community.

Taking a glimpse at the district's overarching financial motives clarified the frustration of the Chicano community, and why it took the Office of Economic Opportunity, and subsequently the National Institute of Education five years to recognize the ruse the district had played. While NIE, the Southwest Network, and the United Front "ousted" the Superintendent and Board of Trustees for their negligence to the community and corrupt budgeting practices, they never received any formal punishment or expulsion. Alum Rock's citizens investigated educational alternatives to stimulate student achievement before vouchers, and it did not stop them from pursuing similar goals following the experiment.

---

[111] O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge*, 158.

Alum Rock's failure to produce germane evidence of vouchers' ameliorative effects on close the achievement gap between individuals of differing socioeconomic statuses did not cause the federal government to betray the concept of vouchers. Judging from the perspectives of Valdez and Kensit, accounts from the *San Jose Mercury News*, and official district and Rand reports, the voucher program failed because the Alum Rock Union School District never allowed for the fundamental goals of the voucher system to penetrate the core of district decision-making.

Alum Rock, additionally exemplified administrative efforts at decentralization as Jefferds envisioned were more than he, or the district, was willing to handle. The decision-making authority transferred to mini-school teachers and personnel left the district staff with lessened discretionary power over how the programs would be operated. Although the board and district received federal voucher funding predicated on pursuing greater opportunities for Alum Rock's disadvantaged families, they resisted doing so if it jeopardized any of their own authority. This conflict of interests caused all sectors of the Alum Rock Union School District families, and more specifically the Mexican-American community, to suffer from the district's misguided motives for implementing the government's method of alternative education.

This study has revealed the untold story of community activism and initiative in Alum Rock, amidst local and national polarization regarding each of the factors in play in Alum Rock: vouchers, decentralization, poverty, and community participation. The bedrock of school vouchers and their propensity to extend freedom of educational choice to all echelons of American society continues to provoke controversy from liberals and conservatives. Yet the challenge underscoring the federal government's interest in using

school vouchers as a vehicle to achieve educational equality is for them to utilize the vantage point of the poor as a resource, rather than as scapegoats towards school profit and centralization.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Government Reports

Alum Rock Union School District. *Transitional Model Voucher Proposal: A Proposal to the Office of Economic Opportunity from the Alum Rock Union School District for Funds to Support a Two-Year Demonstration of an Education Voucher Transition*. Alum Rock, Calif., April 1972. In *Education Vouchers: From Theory to Alum Rock*, ed. James Meckleburger, 276-324. Homewood, Illinois: ETC Publication, 1972.

Coleman, James. *Equality of Educational Opportunity*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966.

Glovinsky, Sanford J. *Final Report: Alum Rock Union Elementary School District Voucher Feasibility Study*. In *Education Vouchers: From Theory to Alum Rock*, ed. James Meckleburger, 235-275. Homewood, Illinois: ETC Publication, 1972.

Jencks, Christopher. *Education Vouchers: A Preliminary Report on Financing Education by Payments to Parents*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Center for the Study of Public Policy, 1970.

Levin, Joel. *Final Report on Third and Fourth Year Operations of the Alum Rock Voucher Project*. San Jose, California: Sequoia Institute, 1976.

Levinson, Eliot. *The Alum Rock Voucher Demonstration: Three Years of Implementation*. Santa Monica, California: Rand Corporation, 1976.

Morland, Kenneth J. *The Tragedy of Public Schools: Prince Edward County Virginia (A Report for the Virginia Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights)*, 16 January1964, <http://www.library.vcu.edu/jbc/speccoll/ report1964.pdf > 08 November 2006.

Weiler, Daniel. *A Public School Voucher Demonstration: The First Year at Alum Rock*, 4 vols. Santa Monica, California: Rand Corporation, 1974.

Statutes

Civil Rights Act of 1964. Public Law 88-352, 88th Cong., 2nd sess., 2 July 1964, section 402.

Economic Opportunity Act. Public Law 88-452, 88th Cong., 2nd sess., 20 August 1964.

Government Documents

California Department of Education, "District Comparison Results," Education Data Partnership,<http://www.edata.k12.ca.us/Navigation/fsTwoPanel.asp?bottom=%2Fprofile

%2Easp%3Flevel%3D05%26reportNumber%3D16>, (04 March 2007).

Glennan, Thomas K. "OEO Experiments in Education." November 1970. In *Education Vouchers: From Theory to Alum Rock*, ed. James Meckleburger, 125-131. Homewood, Illinois: ETC Publication, 1972.

Nixon, Richard M. "Veto Message on the Labor – HEW – OEO Appropriations Bill (H.R. 13111)." 11 August 1969. The America Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=2195&st=&st1=>, (12 November 2006).

Virginia House of Delegates. *House Joint Resolution No. 613.* 13 February 2003.

U.S. Department of Commerce. *Census of Population and Housing.* Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1970.

U.S. Senate Select Committee on Equal Educational Opportunity. *Equal Educational Opportunity Hearings.* 92nd Cong., 1st sess., 1971.

Newspapers

San Jose Mercury News, 1968-1979.

Interviews

Margie Kensit. Interview with author, 28 February 2007, Alum Rock, Calif. Alum Rock Union Elementary School District Office, Alum Rock.

Armando Valdez. Phone interview with author, 1 March 2007, San Jose, Calif.

Secondary Sources

Coleman, James. *Equality and Achievement in Education.* Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1990.

Friedman, Milton. "The Role of Government in Education," *Capitalism and Freedom.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962.

Jencks, Christopher. "Is the Public School Obsolete?" *The Public Interest,* v.2, no. 2 1966.

_____ *Inequality: A Reassessment of the Effects of Family School in America.* New York, New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1972.

LaNoue, George R. *Educational Vouchers: Concepts and Controversies.* New York, New York: Teachers College Press, 1972.

Lassiter, Matthew, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South.*

Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006.

Meckleburger, James, ed. *Education Vouchers: From Theory to Alum Rock.* Homewood, Illinois: ETC Publication, 1972.

Moe, Terry M. *Schools, Vouchers, and the American Public.* Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2001.

O'Connor, Alice. *Poverty Knowledge.* Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001.

Shadick, Robert G. "The Myth of the Apathetic Parent." *The Journal of Negro Education,* vol.39, no.2 (1970): 184-187.

Southwest Network. *This Pamphlet Shows How the Parents and the Community Were Deceived by the Alum Rock Voucher Program.* Hayward, California: Southwest Network, 1974.

Usdan, Michael D. "An Analysis of New York City Participation Experiments." *Theory into Practice,* vol. 8, no. 4, October 1969.