

THE Center for Education Reform



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Back-to-School Alert 4th in a series from CER

STUDENTS IN NEED WHILE UNIONS VOTE TO LEAVE

(Washington, DC 9/6/00) Student achievement gets renewed attention as a majority of children head back to school today. Over the past ten days, the public has awakened to myriad news stories about how children are performing and progressing, from math to science to college boards.

We've also learned quite a bit about how non-traditional educational opportunities are doing. Specifically, the word is in that vouchers indeed help children most in need and, in fact, have proven in some cities so far to arrest the failure to which many minority children were destined.

- In privately funded voucher programs in New York City, Dayton, Ohio and Washington, DC, the performance of African-Americans who switched from public to private schools was 6.3 percent higher after two years; a difference that statisticians consider a "moderately large effect." Policy is often made on far less dramatic gains, such as popular class size proposals which in the most popular study had test score improvements of 4.9 percent. This study by Harvard University's Program on Educational Policy and Governance made national headlines, and can be found in its entirety at hdc-www.harvard.edu/pepg/papers.htm
- The same week the Harvard study came out the public was deluged with news of newly released trend data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress showing that over the last nearly twenty years, there has been uneven progress at best, and that today's highs are just at or above 1970's highs. More importantly however, our most at-risk children and most African-American children still lag behind their white counterparts. For more information, you can visit www.edreform.com/school_choice/
- According to the newly formed Black Alliance for Education Options, "The Condition of Education 2000" put out by the U.S. Department of Education says that parents who select their child's school are "more likely to be very satisfied ... than parents of children attending assigned schools." Find out more about BAEO at www.schoolchoiceinfo.org. The website should be up and running next week.

So why in the midst of such major news reports are teachers' unions voting to strike as so many of our most needy children head back to school? In Philadelphia, PA, where class starts Thursday, the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers voted to walkout, citing problems with district proposals to extend the day and year, institute a version of performance-based pay, and

give principals more authority. Of course, these are all proposals that policymakers increasingly believe will lead to greater school improvement but the union is having nothing to do with it. In Boston, teachers voted to only perform the bare minimum called a "work to rule policy" while contract negotiations continue.

Also consider these reports from the Educational Intelligence Agency which, in the first case, shows that what's good for the goose is apparently good for the gander. (To quote):

Missouri NEA Locks Out Staff, Calls in Police

Last Friday morning, Missouri NEA locked out its staff in the wake of a unanimous strike authorization vote... When an August 23 negotiating session ended with no movement by either side, a federal mediator declared an impasse. Battle lines were drawn soon afterward. On a unanimous 22-0 vote, staff members authorized a strike to begin September 5 if an agreement could not be reached. MNEA, however, had no intention of waiting that long. On August 30, MNEA's executives notified staff members to turn in their keys, files, computer codes and health insurance cards by 3 pm on August 31 (the latter action prompted the staff union to file an unfair labor practice complaint).

As the last employees turned in keys on Thursday, MNEA replaced all the locks. It is assumed that the codes and passwords for the union's computer network and voice mail access have also been changed. The staff showed up for work on Friday morning and, finding themselves locked out, proceeded to set up picket lines at MNEA headquarters in Jefferson City and its seven regional offices throughout the state.

Armed with a \$5.5 million strike fund, the Buffalo Teachers Federation is planning a series of "rotating strikes," even though public employee strikes are illegal in New York State. Buffalo teachers have been without a contract since June 1999 and have called the district's offer of a 6.5 percent raise spread over five years unacceptable. (end quote)

Entrepreneurs Leading Educational Change: It's not too late to sign up for CER's *Second Annual Leaders Forum: Business Delivers Better Schools*, to be held next Monday, September 11, 2000. The day will start with an optional tour of two of the District's finest charter schools. At 12 noon the program will convene at the Willard Inter-Continental Hotel with reform leaders: Connie Jones of the Core Knowledge Foundation, Kim Smith of New Schools Venture Fund, Don Shalvey of Aspire Schools Inc. and Chris Whittle, Edison Schools, Inc.

For more information call Kara at 202-822-9000.

Next Week: What questions should you ask your candidates? CER offers its official 2000 Candidate Education Meter; a complete list of questions to help you survey those running for office and know whether they really are reformers!

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The Center for Education Reform is a national, independent, non-profit advocacy organization providing support and guidance to individuals, community and civic groups, policymakers and others who are working to bring fundamental reforms to their schools. For further information, please call (202) 822-9000 or visit our website at www.edreform.com.

