

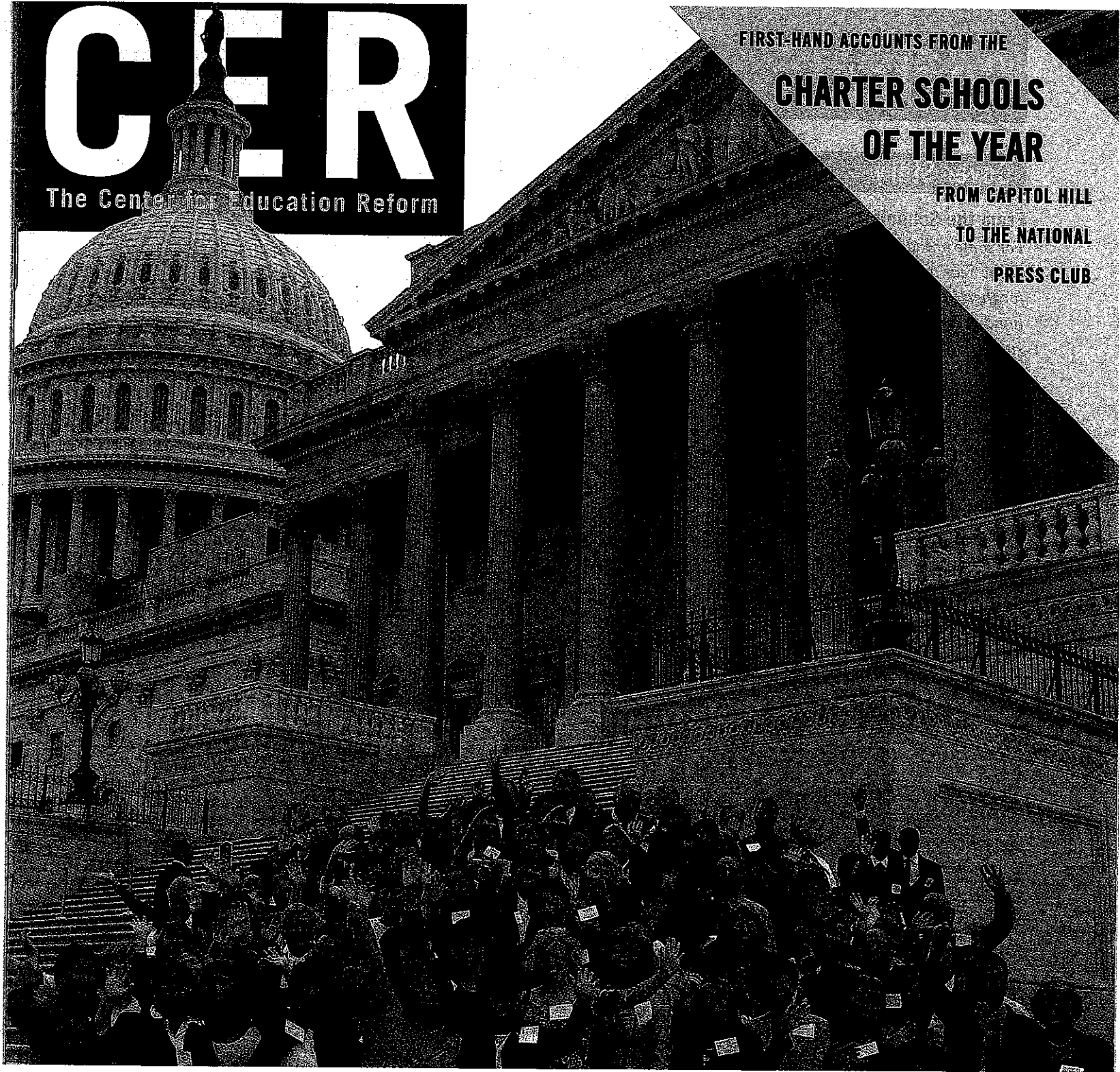
# CER

The Center for Education Reform

FIRST-HAND ACCOUNTS FROM THE

## CHARTER SCHOOLS OF THE YEAR

FROM CAPITOL HILL  
TO THE NATIONAL  
PRESS CLUB



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### 12 From the Schools

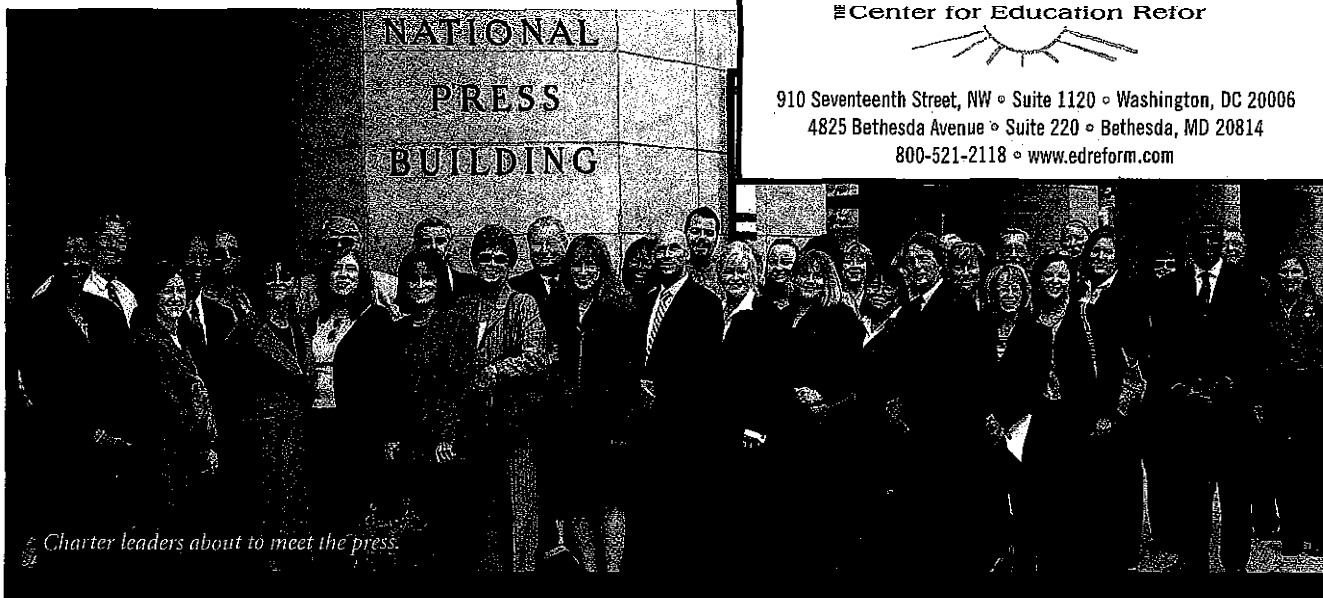
For some of the honored 53, the National Charter School of the Year award was the first time they were recognized for their achievements against the odds. Read their first-hand accounts about the award, their struggles and successes, and the future of the school reform movement.



Rep. Ginny Brown-Waite (R-FL-5th) congratulates leaders from Academy at the Farm.

## 2007 National Charter School of the Year

On May 16, 2007, The Center for Education Reform (CER) honored 53 of the nation's best charter schools as part of its National Charter School of the Year program held in Washington, D.C. at the National Press Club and on Capitol Hill. Chosen from the nation's nearly 4,000 charter schools for excellence in achievement, innovation and accountability, the honorees hailed from 24 states.



Charter leaders about to meet the press.

### 1 Opening Remarks

Jeanne Allen, President of The Center for Education Reform, addresses charter school leaders, colleagues and members of the media at The National Press Club, saluting those leaders whose innovation and achievement have often gone unnoticed.

### 2 Cream of the Crop

Meet the 53 extraordinary charter schools whose innovation, achievement and dedication have changed the face of American education.

### 6 Meet the Press

Following a luncheon and awards presentation at The National Press Club, education writers Jay Mathews, of the Washington Post, and Greg Toppo, of USA Today, offered charter school representatives some valuable advice for working with the media.

### 8 Highlights and Headlines

Catch a glimpse of just a handful of the news coverage across the country, and be sure to not miss the highlights from Capitol Hill where U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings and Members of Congress saluted the charter school representatives.

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# Opening Remarks

*Jeanne Allen, president of the Center for Education Reform, kicks off the day's celebration at The National Press Club*

**Y**OUR PRESENCE HERE TODAY REMINDS us why we do what we do every day.

We really do believe that you represent an incredible snapshot of the world of education reform across the country. I use the words 'education reform' deliberately — and not just charter schools — because "charter" is simply the tool, but what you are engaged in is the actual transformation and improvement of public education in its entirety.



The Center for Education Reform works to do just that. Some people like to say we're the charter group, and we politely correct them. We are, in reality, the education reform group — CER will do anything it takes to help make sure that education takes place closest to kids and that people who are empowered — parents and teachers — are best empowered to deliver that education.

If one way that happens is through a charter, so be it. Tomorrow, there might be a completely new tool, but one of the key reasons that we have selected you and brought you together is to send the message that there are great schools doing this outside of the existing system. There are systems that are taking advantage of those lessons. There are some that are choosing to ignore it, but regardless, it is what you do and how you educate. It is not the thing itself.

We will give the media a little glimpse of your efforts and provide you with insights from two of the nation's top reporters who travel around the country and follow education reform. And we'll meet many of your Congressional representatives and they'll tell you as well what it is that helps them embrace this kind of education reform.

## The Stories You Won't Hear on Oprah

The National Charter School Year of the Award started out to find the one best charter to salute. But we found out as we started receiving applications that there isn't one. Our effort took on a wholly different meaning when we determined that the best service we can provide to the cause of good education and public recognition is to identify as many as the process would allow and introduce those schools, their success, and their stories to people who wouldn't necessarily see and hear about you on Oprah. And yet, you deserve to be with the beautiful "O" herself just as much as your colleagues who have been there. Above all, everybody else in between needs to know about you.

So, to those of you who are often recognized, we salute you. To those of you who are not, we are so glad to help you get the recognition you deserve. We are grateful to you for all of your commitment and the work you do every day.

Your role here today is vital. Together, we need to build a fundamental understanding in the public and among our policymakers about not only your success but the challenges you face. Together, we will address bad policies, inequities that hurt kids, and myths that aim to put you out of business. By succeeding and doing well, we are more than half-the-way there. And when you return to your school communities, we encourage you to brag about your award, your experience here, and to challenge more people to demand better. We share that responsibility and that obligation. And we're happy to be your partner in that endeavor.

Thank you.



*Jeanne Allen addresses the charter school leaders.*

# Cream of the Crop

**T**HE 53 EXEMPLARY CHARTER SCHOOLS honored at the Charter School of the Year event on May 16, in Washington, DC represent the very best of a growing movement to help improve educational opportunity for over one million children across the nation.

From nearly 4,000 charter schools in the country, these 53 exceptional schools stood out as deserving recognition for their achievement, improvement, ability to overcome obstacles, and their inspiration to the entire movement.

## Meet the Schools

*(listed alphabetically by state, order does not represent rank.)*

**Academic Center of Excellence, Cabot, AR.** With a population of 95 percent at-risk students, it's astounding how much proficiency was raised in 8th grade math. The students went from 17 percent proficient in 2004-2005, to 62 percent in 2005-2006. 501-843-3138, <http://cabot.k12.ar.us/ACE/ACE.html>

**Lisa Academy, Little Rock, AR.** The Academy's curriculum utilizes college preparatory mathematics and the foundational approaches in science teaching, both designated as "Exemplary" programs by the U.S. Department of Education. 501-227-4942, <http://www.lisaacademy.org>

**Challenge Charter School, Glendale, AZ.** This Arizona school provides a sound educational environment grounded in the fundamentals of a hands-on, science-oriented, academic core curriculum. It's easy to see why this school has a waiting list of over 300. 602-938-5411, <http://www.challengecharterschool.net>

**Triumphant Learning Center, Safford, AZ.** Scores don't lie. With over 80 percent proficiency in math and reading, it's no wonder this Arizona school develops critical thinking skills, cooperative problem solving, and respect for self and community by promoting its motto, "Excellence Personified." 928-348-8422, <http://myweb.cableone.net/tlctiger>

**American Indian Public Charter School, Oakland, CA.** After meeting their AYP target for the past six years in a row, AIPCS became the first public school in Oakland, California to receive the national "Blue Ribbon" award. 510-482-6000, <http://www.aipcs.org>



*Rollie Ford of Austin's Star Charter and Jeanne Allen.*

**Guajome Park Academy, Vista, CA.** Honored with the California Distinguished School Award, this grade school builds an inclusive learning community with all students participating in the International Baccalaureate program. 760-631-8500, <http://www.guajome.net>

**KIPP San Francisco, San Francisco, CA.** Boasting remarkable improvements on the Academic Performance Index, (API), KIPP students outperformed 98 percent of all California public schools with a 140-point increase. 415-440-4306, <http://www.sfbayacademy.org>

**The Preuss School UCSD, La Jolla, CA.** This school was designed as an intensive college preparatory program for low-income students who would represent the first generation in their families to graduate from college. In 2004, 2005, and 2006, the school graduated its first three classes. 858-658-7400, <http://preuss.ucsd.edu>

**Synergy Charter Academy, Los Angeles, CA.** Started by teachers, this school increased its Academic Performance Index (API) by 104 points, from 709 to 813, making it the highest performing school in all of South Los Angeles. 323-233-8559, <http://wearesynergy.org/>

**Jefferson Academy Elementary, Broomfield, CO.** After winning its charter through an appeals process that was the first of its kind in the state, Jefferson Academy ranks in the top 16 percent, or better, in overall achievement of schools in Colorado. 303-438-1011, <http://www.jajags.com/>

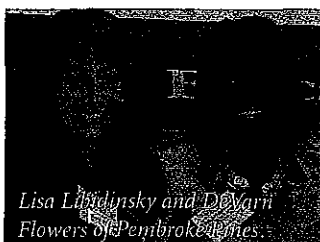
**Liberty Common School, Ft. Collins, CO.** In 2005-2006 Liberty ranked No. 1 in its district for standardized tests, and with 99 percent of their students graduating on time, it's no wonder Liberty Common School has 941 students on their waiting list. 970-482-9800, <http://www.libertycommon.org>

**Ridgeview Classical Schools, Ft. Collins, CO.** Based on the 9th and 10th graders' scores on the CSAP and the 11th graders' scores on the ACT, RCS was ranked the No. 1 school in Colorado for the past two years in a row. 970-494-4620, <http://www.ridgeviewclassical.com>

**Academy at the Farm, Dade City, FL.** This grade school satisfied 100 percent of AYP criteria and is one of the top 100 elementary schools out of 2,400 in the state of Florida for improvements in writing. 352-588-9737, <http://www.academyatthefarm.com>

**Downtown Academy of Technology and Arts, Ft. Lauderdale, FL.** The school's state rating jumped from an "F" to an "A" over the past year. It ranks 3rd out of 2,854 schools and has received the Governor's Award for School Improvement. 954-767-0403, <http://www.downtownacademy.org>

**Pembroke Pines Charter Elementary and Middle School, Pembroke Pines, FL.** In 2005-2006, 90 percent of all students scored at or above grade level in reading and math. In addition, each charter family is required to spend 30 hours per year volunteering at the school. 954-322-3300, <http://www.pinescharter.com>



**Pembroke Pines Charter High School, Pembroke Pines, FL.** Following in the footsteps of the Pembroke Pines Elementary and Middle School, this charter high school showed improvements in math and reading proficiency up to 82 percent and 56 percent, respectively. With over 1,663 children on the waiting list, they must be doing something right. 954-538-3700, <http://www.pinescharter.com>

**Chamblee Charter High School, Chamblee, GA.** Significant gains in achievement and winning the Governor's Cup in 2006 and 2007 for the highest SAT scores are factors in this winner's selection. 678-676-6902, <http://www.dekalb.k12.ga.us/chambleehs/>

**Kennesaw Charter School, Kennesaw, GA.** While having a very impressive proficiency rating across the board, KCS is not just about academics, as is evident in the school's fine arts department, which includes art, music, band, and foreign language. 678-290-9628, <http://www.kennesawcharter.com>

**Coeur d'Alene Charter Academy, Coeur d'Alene, ID.** This amazing charter school ranks among the highest test scores in the state, with 95-100 percent proficiency rate. 208-676-1667, <http://www.cdacharter.org>

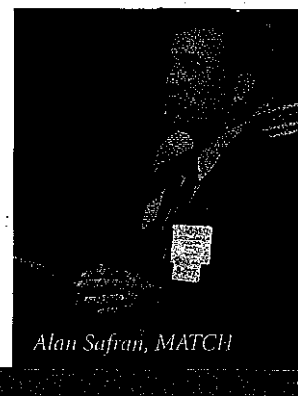
**Prairie Crossing Charter School, Grayslake, IL.** Prairie Crossing offers an innovative curriculum that uses an ecological, integrated, experimental approach to learning to develop students who demonstrate environmental stewardship and global citizenship. 847-543-9722, <http://www.pccs.lake.k12.il.us>

**Signature School, Evansville, IN.** As one of Indiana's most successful public schools, Signature was ranked No. 54 in Newsweek's Top 100 High Schools. Their 69 seniors were awarded over \$4.5 million in scholarships from some of the best colleges in the nation. 812-421-1820, <http://www.signature.edu>

**The International School of Louisiana, New Orleans, LA.** This elementary school provides a challenging education, emphasizing French or Spanish language immersion, international awareness, and community responsibility. 504-654-1088, <http://www.isl-edu.org>

**Excel Academy Charter School, East Boston, MA.** These grade school students, who are prepared to succeed in high school and college, consistently score among the top Massachusetts' charter school student on state assessments. 617-561-1371, <http://www.excelacademy.org>

**MATCH Charter Public High School, Boston, MA.** MATCH has surpassed all expectations and has excelled in all areas of public education. The school serves a population that is 96 percent minority and works to achieve the goal of sending all students on to a 4-year college or university. 617-232-2838, <http://www.matcheschool.org>



# Cream of the Crop (continued)

**Roxbury Preparatory Charter School, Roxbury, MA.** Not only did students improve their scores on the 8th grade science and 7th grade English exams, but RPCS outscored every district in the state of Massachusetts on the 8th grade math exam. 617-566-2361, <http://www.roxburyprep.org>

**Ann Arbor Learning Community, Ann Arbor, MI.** Ann Arbor is a grade school that fosters the development of essential life skills and core academic knowledge through small, multi-aged classrooms. 734-477-0340, <http://www.annarborlearningcommunity.org/>

**Detroit Edison Public School Academy, Detroit, MI.** In 2005, Edison was recognized as the No. 1 charter school in Michigan and was awarded the Michigan Association of Public School Academies' (MAPSA) Charter School of Excellence Award. 313-833-1100, <http://www.detroitedisonpsa.org>

**Community of Peace Academy, St. Paul, MN.** This school was one of eight charter schools included in the U.S. Department of Education publication (2004), *Successful Charter Schools*, for its demonstrated success over time in boosting student achievement. 651-776-5151, <http://cpa.charter.k12.mn.us/main.html>

**Gaston College Preparatory, Gaston, NC.** For the past four years, the Department of Public Instruction has named Gaston College Prep a North Carolina School of Excellence for having more than 90 percent of its students making AYP and performing at Achievement Level III or above. 252-308-6932, <http://www.kippnc.org>

**Kinston Charter Academy, Kinston, NC.** Kinston Academy offers a rigorous, interactive, integrated, and problem-centered curriculum in math, science, and Spanish. 252-522-0210, <http://www.kinstoncharteracademy.com>

**Hoboken Charter School, Hoboken, NJ.** As one of the first schools to be chartered in the state of New Jersey, HCS just received its 5-year renewal in the fall of 2006. Everyone at HCS is pleased to be able to continue educating the youth of the Garden State. 201-963-0222, <http://www.hobokencs.org>

**Princeton Charter School, Princeton, NJ.** This school has received a long list of accolades that include "Charter School of Distinction" in 2004 and national recognition as a Blue Ribbon School in the same year. 609-924-0575, <http://www.pcs.k12.nj.us>

**21st Century Public Academy, Albuquerque, NM.** In September of 2000, 21st Century opened its doors to a 6th grade class of 40 children and became the first independent charter middle school in New Mexico. 505-254-0280, <http://www.21stcenturypa.org/>

**Moreno Valley High School, Angel Fire, NM.** This high school was ranked 36th in the nation in the Washington Post 2006 Challenge Index and provides a world-class education for students of all abilities and backgrounds. 505-377-3100

**Taos Municipal Charter School, Taos, NM.** This courageous charter has the largest percentage of learning-disabled children in the district and has still managed to make AYP. The local superintendent uses them as a model for success in New Mexico. 505-751-7222, <http://www.taoscharterschool.org>

**Amber Charter School, New York, NY.** Opening a charter school in NYC is a difficult feat to accomplish, and when 100 percent of your student body is low-income and minority, it's even tougher. Yet Amber's students have met AYP for the past two years in a row. 212-534-9667, <http://ambercharter.echalk.com>

**Explore Charter School, Brooklyn, NY.** With a 100 percent minority student population and a very high percentage eligible for free or reduced priced lunch, this charter school in NYC, with an 881-student waiting list, is achieving more than anyone imagined possible. 718-703-4484, <http://www.explorecharterschool.org>

**Harlem Village Academy, New York, NY.** Out of 1,400 NYC public schools, Harlem Village Academy ranked 3rd highest in reading improvement. After just two years, students went from the bottom 25th and 35th percentiles in reading and math to the 77th and 94th percentiles, respectively. 616-548-9570, <http://www.villageacademies.org>



Toledo's Elizabeth Emmert and David Gierke

**Toledo School for the Arts, Toledo, OH.** In 2005-2006, Toledo School for the Arts was ranked "Excellent" by the state of Ohio and was one of only 30 charter schools (out of 295 in Ohio) to receive that distinction. 419-246-8732, <http://www.ts4arts.org/>

**Western Village Academy, Oklahoma City, OK.** This is the first elementary charter school in Oklahoma City, proudly serving over 90 percent low-income, minority students. Their API increased from the 400's to 1229 in 2005-2006. 405-751-1774, <http://www.wvacademy.com>


**Bear Creek Community Charter School, Wilkes Barre, PA.** After adding 150 students since its opening two years ago, there has been a very significant improvement in the PSSA scores. Their 2006 achievement data reached well above the goal set by the state. 570-820-4070, <http://www.bearcreekschool.com>

**Independence Charter School, Philadelphia, PA.** To assist those few students who are not proficient, ICS provides a highly qualified teaching assistant in every classroom, after-school tutoring, summer school at no cost, and direct parental involvement. 215-238-8000, <http://www.independencecharter.org>

**The Laboratory Charter School of Communication and Languages, Bala Cynwyd, PA.** With over 97 percent of their students proficient in math and reading, this charter school has set itself apart by being recognized as a NCLB Blue Ribbon School and by offering instruction in two world languages other than English. 610-617-9121, <http://www.labcharter.org/>

**Mathematics, Science & Technology Community Charter School, Philadelphia, PA.** A K-12 grade school that promotes continuous learning, with a clear focus on mathematics, science, and technology, that responds to student needs at different stages of development. 267-348-1100, <http://www.mastcharter.org>

**Renaissance Academy, Phoenixville, PA.** Edison Charter School - Renaissance is a parent-founded charter school that prepares students for success in college. Its scores show progress with more than a 76 percent proficiency rate in both math and reading. 610-983-4080, <http://www.rak12.org/>

 **Paul Cuffee School, Providence, RI.** Faculty and staff choose to work at Paul Cuffee under the terms of year-to-year, non-union contracts. Turnover is low and satisfaction is high with a 97 percent parent satisfaction rate and a waiting list of 300. 401-453-2626, <http://www.paulcuffee.org>

**Discovery School, Lancaster, SC.** On the 2006 annual report card issued by the state of South Carolina, 100 percent of Discovery students surveyed were satisfied with the learning environment, the social and physical environment, and school-home relations. 803-285-8430

**Greenville Technical Charter High School, Greenville, SC.** This innovative charter school has received the Palmetto Gold Award every year since 2003. In addition, 100 percent of the student body is proficient in math and reading, which sets the standard for all public schools in South Carolina. 864-250-8844, <http://www.gtchs.org>



**Midland Valley Preparatory School, Graniteville, SC.** By taking students who have not been successful in traditional public schools, Midland met AYP objectives and closed the achievement gap. 803-594-1028

**Cornerstone Academy, Houston, TX.** Because of the tremendous success of Cornerstone's unique instructional program, it has been rated "Exemplary" by the Texas Education Agency each year since it opened in 1998. 713-365-5766, <http://csa.springbranchisd.com/>

**The Fort Worth Academy of Fine Arts, Fort Worth, TX.** This school provides a structured environment for the development of world-class artists and citizens. Texas ranked FWFA "Exemplary" the first two years it was open. 817-924-1482, <http://www.fwafa.org>

**Star Charter School, Austin, TX.** This innovative charter was recognized in 2006 as the highest performing charter school in Texas. In addition, Star Charter School has had several National Merit Scholars between 2004 and 2007. 512-989-2672, <http://www.stararterschool.org>

**John Greenleaf Whittier School, Milwaukee, WI.** The students and faculty at Whittier have shown tremendous progress in math proficiency and have graduated 100 percent of their students on time. Whittier also boasts a vast array of extra-curricular activities for its students. 414-294-1400, <http://www2.milwaukee.k12.wi.us/whittier/whittier.htm>



# Meet the Press

## Greg Toppo, *USA Today*

*USA Today* national education reporter Greg Toppo kicked off the “Meet the Press” event at the National Press Club by sharing some insights on media with the Charter School of the Year awardees. Toppo offered his unique perspective as an education reporter who covers the beat with the knowledge and expertise that only a former teacher can provide. One of the most respected journalists in education, Toppo opened with a bang, demonstrating the biggest challenge charter schools face:

*“I tell people sometimes that I don’t write about charter schools very often because every time I do, my editor says, ‘Tell me again what a charter school is.’”*



Greg Toppo

For the charter school leaders who laughed politely at his admission of media ignorance about charter schools, Toppo followed with a simple guideline for pitching stories to the media:

*“What I always tell people is that the guideline for talking to the media is very similar to that in pitching a movie idea that I heard once. It is something called the ‘parking lot test.’ The idea is that you stand on one end of a parking lot, and somebody else is standing on the other end. If you can yell the idea of your movie to the other guy and have him understand it, then that movie will probably get made. If not, you are in trouble.”*

*“The idea that you want to get across needs to be very concise. It needs to be very clear. It is kind of like when you are reading the paper. When you pick up the newspaper, you get what you are reading about almost from the very second your eyes hit the page. There might be a lot of depth, and it might be a story that opens up to two facing pages and photos and charts and graphs and stuff, but you understand what the story is about right away.”*

Like a true writer, he demonstrated his point with a story about his daughter and a lesson in journalism he offered her and her other home-schooled friends. The lesson applied just as easily to the charter school community:

*“I told them, ‘You need to have an idea for a newspaper. We are going to put out a newspaper, and everybody needs to have a story idea.’”*

*“So, at the first meeting, they all sit down, and these kids are about 7 to 11 or 12-years-old. I go around the table and say, ‘Okay. What is your idea?’ They had this great response, like: ‘Well, it is about a guy, and he’s cool. He’s really cool. I met him the other day, and he does this thing. I think he might let me talk to him. He’s got a pony, and we are going to maybe talk on Sunday.’”*

*“I’m like, ‘Wait a minute. Wait a minute. What’s the idea? Tell me what your story is about.’ So I told them about the parking lot test, and they got it little by little. At the very end of the table, my daughter who was then 8-years-old is sitting there with this big smile on her face. I finally get to her, and I say, ‘So what’s your idea?’ She says, ‘Acupuncture for dogs.’ I said, ‘Okay. That’s it. I get it. Say no more.’ She actually did write a great story about acupuncture for dogs.”*

## Feeding the Media

Finally, he offered a few examples of things journalist like when they are being pitched:

☹ *“[Journalists] like numbers.”*

☹ *“We also like transparency and openness. We want to be able to see whoever we want to see whenever we want to see them.”*

## Jay Mathews, *Washington Post*

As a *Washington Post* education reporter, columnist, and author, Jay Mathews has become a household name across the nation thanks to the wit and humor he brings to his writing. He brings that same character to speaking engagements. Mathews entertained the crowd and provided his own tips on how charter schools are viewed and how charter leaders can sell their stories. But all of that came after he showered the audience with praise for being a part of an education reform movement that has captured his journalistic passion.



*"There is no question in my mind that you are what is happening. You are going to be the most exciting thing that is going to be happening for the rest of my life at least, and I just can't tell you how proud I am and how excited I am by what I am seeing happening in charter schools around the country."*



Jay Mathews

To demonstrate just what it is about charter schools that he loves, Mathews told of the first time he came across a charter school – and more importantly – a passionate and dedicated charter school leader.

*"I encountered my first charter school in 2001. I am in the basement of a church in Anacostia, the poorest part of D.C., and there are these people, these young people down in the basement putting together this school. The director was this young woman, 29-years-old, named Susan Schaeffler, and all her teachers — there were three or four of them — were younger than she was."*

*"That was the first of the KIPP schools, the Knowledge is Power Program schools in D.C. That school, now moved to larger quarters, has the highest math and reading scores of any public school in this city, including the two or three middle schools in the Northwest part of the town where a lot of the kids are middle class. I think that sort of says it. You are the creative core. What is exciting about all your schools is that you can really do what works."*

With that said, Mathews offered "three silly things that people say about charter schools" and "four things to think about when trying to sell a story."

### **Silly Things People Say**

☺ *"They say, 'Charter schools have to be innovative. If I don't see something that is brand new in the charter school, that charter school is obviously not doing its job.' That is just nonsense. Charter schools are there to help kids, to raise achievement, to do things that work. What you want is a school that works. I don't care what they are doing. A lot of the things we know that works, nobody uses. So it is your results that matter."*

☺ *"The second silly thing, it is silly to say that you are somehow stealing kids and resources from the public schools. I war against my own newspaper's insistence on sort of dividing the world into regular D.C. public schools and D.C. charter schools."*

☺ *"The third silly thing people say about charter schools or do with charter schools is to try to set up a situation in which teachers who go to charter schools are sort of traitors to the cause. That feeling that you are somehow helping kids is a traitorous act is just silly."*

### **Selling A Story**

☺ *"One, I think you have to — particularly when you are dealing with big self-important newspapers like mine and Greg's who think we're the Nation's answer to journalism — you need to tap into the national zeitgeist in some way. Reflecting on something that happens at your school helps, to reflect on something that is happening at your school that seems to fit whatever educators are talking about, whatever education reporters are talking about [helps more]."*

☺ *"Number two, let us see your numbers. Some schools are shy about that. If you have got good numbers coming up, tell us about them. So don't be shy. Reporters love numbers. We generally write stories that are full of kind of vague things, and editors love to see hard numbers. If you have got data, tell us."*

☺ *"Number three, remember that we can be guilty. Remember that we have consciences, and if we do something bad, you can use that against us."*

☺ *"Four, the last point, although we like numbers, remember that we like national trends. What really makes journalism different from any other kind of writing, is it is about people. So, if you have got a teacher, a kid with a story, something unusual, let me know about it."*

***"I just get so charged up being around charter school people. You are the creative core of American public education today."***



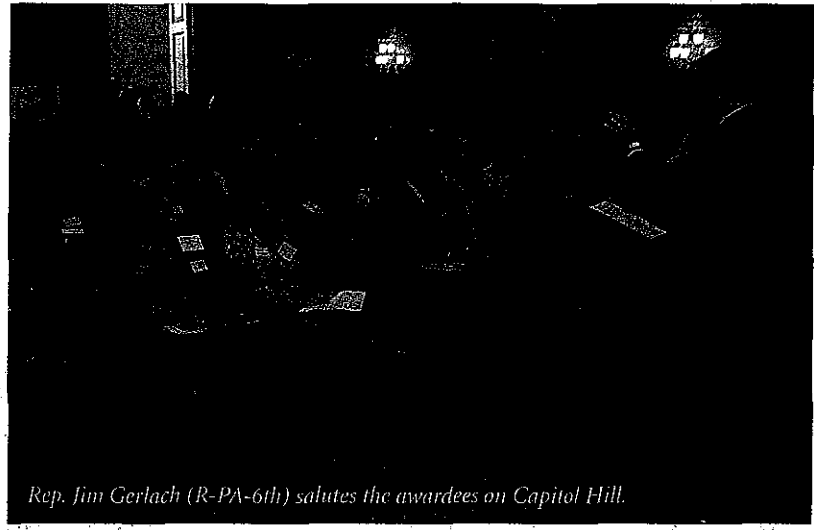
# CORNELL & LAKE HOLCOMBE COURIER



Whittier takes pride in their academic success and recognition as a National Charter School of the Year.

## Whittier School named a Charter School of the Year Students, staff and community to celebrate achievements

John Greenleaf Whittier end of each school year. While their office, this small school, 4322 S. 3rd St., was recently named a Charter School of the Year for Education Reform (CER) for its high academic achievement and strong relationships with the community. The school was recognized with this honor at a special awards ceremony in Washington, D.C. on May 18. Peggy Myer, Lead Teacher at Whittier, and Robin Kitzow, Administrative Support Staff, attended on behalf of the school to accept the award. In celebration of being recognized for its outstanding achievements, Whittier held a ceremony on Fri., May 22 in its gymnasium. Speakers included Atlanta Senator, MPS Francisco Anguiano, and Milwaukee Alderman Terry Wisniewski. Banners and signs decorated by each classroom were adorned the hall and cake was served. Serving 215 students ranging from kindergarten to fifth grade, Whittier has an attendance rate of 98% and a promotion rate of 100%, meaning its students regularly move on to the next grade level at the



Rep. Jim Gerlach (R-PA-6th) salutes the awardees on Capitol Hill.

# The Providence Journal

EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION



First-grade students Ronald Desrosiers and Wilton Ahametale read together at the Paul Cuffee Charter School in Providence.

## Cuffee named one of the best charter schools in country

BY ANNA HERR  
Providence — The Paul Cuffee School has been named one of the best charter schools in the country by the Center for Education Reform, a national education policy and advocacy group based in Washington, D.C. Cuffee, a K-5 charter school built around a magnet theme, was one of 23 honored during the National Charter School of the Year program held at the National Press Club last Wednesday. Chosen from hundreds of charter schools nationwide, the winners pulled from 24 states. Cuffee was the only school chosen from Rhode Island, which has 11 charter schools.

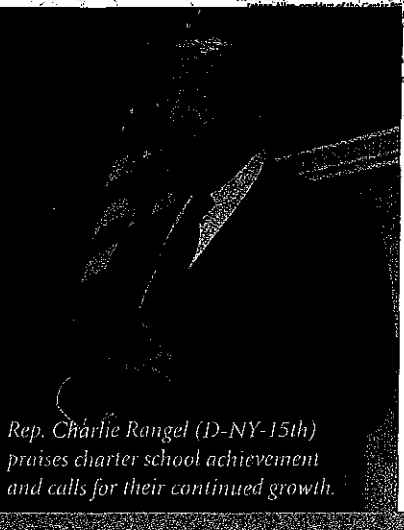
the crop" of the students from the area, but Allen is quick to counter that claim. "The ability to offer charter school parents every better educational and their children aren't any less at risk," she said. "Charter schools have to convince parents to send their children there. They don't have a captive audience."

If anything, charter schools often get children who have struggled in the regular classroom and so may be lacking their new school performing below grade level. What makes charter schools, she said, is that they are flexible and nimble enough to respond to a child's learning needs.

IN CUFFEE'S CASE, student improvement over time was exceptional, Allen said, adding that the school's math scores last year were 40 percent higher than comparable public schools in Providence.

"Cuffee has an incredibly positive community culture," she said in a telephone interview.

BY ANNA HERR



Rep. Charlie Rangel (D-NY-15th) praises charter school achievement and calls for their continued growth.

"I am proud of what is happening [in charter schools] in my community. I just wish it was happening to my country. I love this country so much that I'm concerned that kids who have the potential, don't have the opportunities."  
— Rep. Charles Rangel (D-NY-15th)

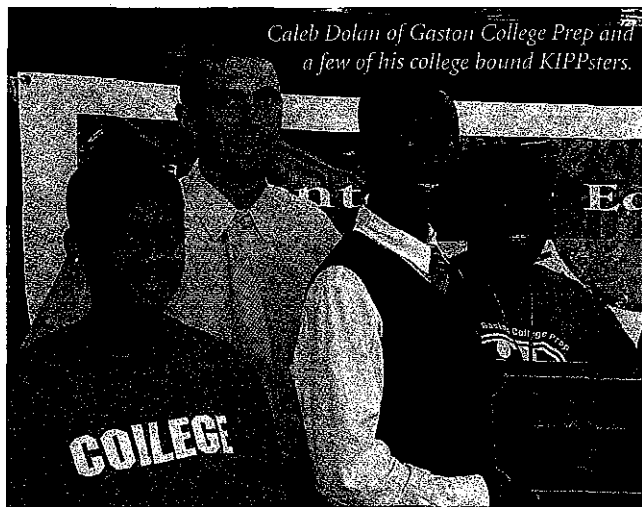
"I haven't been a part of the movement until today. Today, I realized that [Toledo School for the Arts] is not the only school doing great things. You all are doing great things and I want to be a part of this family."  
— David Gierke, Toledo School for the Arts

"This movement is a civil rights movement."  
— Alan Safran, MATCH Charter Public HS

"I think this recognition makes us some of the top educators in the country. We really appreciate being appreciated for everything we do every day."  
— Janice Solkov, Bear Creek Community Charter School

"I just wanted to say thank you to the Center for Education Reform for this great day of celebration. It is really phenomenal. It's an overwhelming feeling."  
— Andi Fanelli McGunnigle, Renaissance Academy-Edison

# Highlights and Headlines (continued)

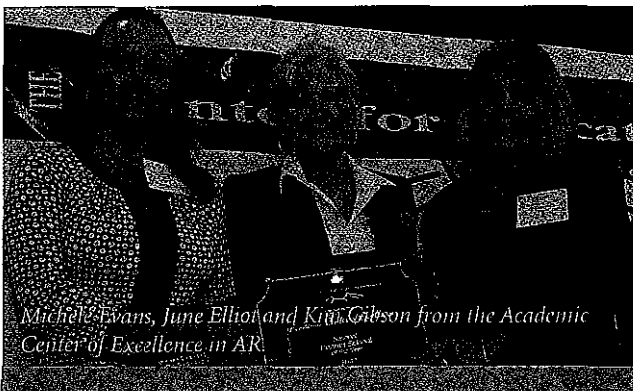


Caleb Dolan of Gaston College Prep and a few of his college bound KIPPsters.

☉ "You are turning out incredible kids across the nation that are truly achieving. What you do at the ground level trickles all the way up to D.C. and into my office."  
— Dean Kern, U.S. Department of Education

☉ "The one thing that brings us all together is that we are almost all working in second-rate facilities. [Star Charter] is the highest performing charter school in Texas, but come look at us... we are a trailer city behind an old house. That's because we put our money into our children."  
— Rollie Ford, Star Charter School

☉ "[Our students] are living proof that things can be turned around in a short period of time. Our students were successful in spite of the challenges they face. We just imagine how much higher they could perform if we got rid of the 'in spite of' and set up a system where students are successful 'because of' the system."  
— Randy Palisoc, Synergy Charter Academy



Michelle Evans, June Elliot and Kira Gibson from the Academic Center of Excellence in AR.

## The Philadelphia Inquirer

June 27, 2007

Once seen as urban, charter schools sprout up outside cities.



CHARLES FOX / Inquirer Staff Photographer  
At Renaissance Academy-Edison Charter School in Phoenixville, third-grade teacher Michel Finn wears a respirator during a career lesson on environmental engineering.

## In suburbia, a new school of thought

By Imiti S. Kadaba  
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

With only five days of school left, advanced-math fifth graders at Renaissance Academy-Edison Charter School considered a new concept: how to compute the surface area of a juice box.

"I know you're up for the challenge," said teacher Shari Benowitz, 31.

The children, wearing red polos and khakis, huddled in small groups to strategize as Benowitz leaned over them and offered encouragement.

Such rigorous curriculum and individual attention, administrators say, have boosted the Chester County schools' standardized, math and reading scores substantially, since it opened in 2000. Last month, the Center for Education Reform recognized that improvement by naming Renaissance a national charter of the year.

"It was progress over time," said Jeanne Allen, president of the Washington advocacy group, which supports charters. "There was just no question they were exceptional."

Once found almost exclusively in urban centers with dismal academic options, charters such as Renaissance — located in a

### Charter School Enrollments 2006-07

Counties	Students	Schools
Bucks	1,843	3
Chester	3,584	7
Delaware	2,566	3
Montgomery	1,140	1
Philadelphia	2,329	56
Carroll	2,329	6

NOTE: Gloucester and Burlington have no charter schools. Cyber charter schools and enrollers are not included.

SOURCES: ESRI; Tale Atlas; Inquirer Report Card on the Schools

MITI S. BULLMAN / Inquirer Staff Artist

bucofic corner of the solid-performing Phoenixville Area School District — have become increasingly common in the suburbs.

Chester County in particular is a charter hotbed. Outside of Philadelphia, where 66 charters serve 27,500 students, the county leads the region with an enrollment of near-  
See CHARTER SCHOOLS on A9

☉ "We have gone through adversity, but with adversity comes an opportunity. We now have an opportunity to shine even more because our kids are engaged in learning thanks to the dedication of our teachers."

— Sean Wilson, International School of Louisiana

# EASTERN ARIZONA COURIER

## TLC named one of the National Charter Schools of the Year

BY CALLEEN WIND  
STAFF WRITER

Reading, writing and arithmetic are not the only subjects implemented at Safford's Triumphant Learning Center. The local charter school also has a strong focus on teaching students civic duties and responsibilities while nurturing their academic needs.

This paid off recently when TLC was recognized by The Center for Education Reform as one of the National Charter Schools of the Year.

According to a press release from the center, all United States charter schools were evaluated in four areas: achievement, planning and execution, satisfaction, and policies and programs. Other areas that were looked at include: improvement over time, percentage of at-risk students served, meeting mission and goals, and parental involvement. TLC was among 53 schools recognized nationally and two in Arizona for excelling in these areas.

Charter school Principal and founder Robin Dutt said, "We remember that it's about the kids and their academic and personal growth. It's not about paychecks, days off or benefits. It's all about the kids."

According to Dutt, one reason the school is doing so well is that the staff cares about the students' growth and encourages them to do things they have never done and never thought they could do.

"The students have been given the opportunity to give back to society and the community, this is something that is often missed in other schools," Dutt said.

The school's Rotary Club donated \$75 to World Vision, an organization that aids third-world countries, to give a school in Angola a safe water supply. TLC's students also send backpacks filled with school supplies to a sister school in Nogales, Mexico.

TLC has an enrollment of 95 students and an average class size of 22, Dutt said. "Everybody is involved. We



Triumphant Learning Center is chosen as one of the top charter schools in the nation by The Center for Education Reform.

talk about leadership, responsibility and respect in our classes." Not only are the character traits taught, students are expected to use them.

This is the first national award the school has received in its 11 years of educating, and Dutt said, "We will applaud each other and say 'good job'. This is exciting to be recognized at the national level, but we must remember not to let our heads get puffed up and to continue to give kids what they need to become productive

adults."

Seventh- and eighth-grade teacher Brian Lehner said, "I have seen (the school) grow so much. There is a teacher's aide in every room (and) two adults and more (when necessary) make us able to catch up when a student is behind and get them the help they need."

When eighth-grader Brian Todd enrolled at TLC, he was behind in his schooling. Now, because of the guidelines and procedures (used by the school), he is caught up to his grade level. Todd commented on the availability of one-on-one tutoring, while Dutt talked about the school's use of diagnostic testing to determine a student's problem and correct measures to overcome it.

Eva Rios, first- and second-grade teacher, said, "I have an enthusiastic, structured, positive classroom, and I have high expectations of my students. I inspire all of my students to achieve excellence in everything they do."

Dutt said, "We have tried to create an environment in which kids can excel. I think we have been successful, and my goal is to continue."



(left to right) Carleen Clark, Russ Spicer, Senator Allard, Cindy Staudt, Kim Miller, Peggy Schunk and Michael Munier from the Centennial State.

*"You could not have a better leader than Jeanne Allen, who is a tremendous champion and reformer. She is a great friend of charters and kids and we are all lucky to have her on our side."*

— Margaret Spellings, U.S. Secretary of Education

☉ "One thing that I hope everyone can stand for is excellence. I hope we are against lousy schools - charter or traditional. If a school isn't educating kids it needs to go, the same way as if a teacher isn't educating kids, they need to leave. We need to stand for the best people teaching our kids because they deserve no less."

— Caleb Dolan, Gaston College Prep

☉ "You have to believe in what you're doing because there is going to be a time when you're the only one who believes in it. You have to be able to stand up and do what is right for the children."

— Lilian Thomas-Wilson, Midland Valley Prep

☉ "One of our difficulties is that our authorizers don't really support us. We are the top-ranked high school in Colorado and we had to spend thousands of dollars on an attorney to get a charter renewal. It doesn't make sense when we are serving kids and educating kids. We need the legislators to help us out."

— Kim Miller, Ridgeview Classical Schools

☉ "It is a social injustice that there are kids in Boston and across the country who are dying to learn from high quality teachers that are dying to teach them [but are not getting that opportunity] and we need to do everything we can to fix that injustice."

— Katie Dankleff, Excel Academy

☉ "It's so nice to be with a group where everyone is more concerned with making good children than making lots of money."

— Suzanne Baxley, Discovery School



Senator Larry Craig of Idaho

Center for Education Reform



# National Charter School of the Year 2007

Congratulations to our 53 winners. You inspire us all by your success!

**Arkansas**  
Academic Center of Excellence  
Lisa Academy

**Arizona**  
Challenge Charter School  
Triumphant Learning Center

**California**  
American Indian Public Charter School  
Guajome Park Academy  
KIPP San Francisco Bay Academy  
Synergy Charter Academy  
The Preuss School, UCSD

**Colorado**  
Jefferson Academy  
Liberty Common School  
Ridgeview Classical Schools

**Florida**  
Academy at the Farm  
Downtown Academy of Technology and Arts  
Pembroke Pines Elementary & Middle Charter School  
Pembroke Pines Charter High School

**Georgia**  
Chamblee Charter High School  
Kennesaw Charter School

**Idaho**  
Coeur d'Alene Charter Academy

**Illinois**  
Prairie Crossing Charter School

**Indiana**  
Signature Learning Center

**Louisiana**  
International School of Louisiana

**Massachusetts**  
Excel Academy Charter School  
MATCH Charter Public High School  
Roxbury Preparatory Charter School

**Michigan**  
Ann Arbor Learning Community  
Detroit Edison Public School Academy

**Minnesota**  
Community of Peace Academy

**North Carolina**  
Gaston College Preparatory  
Kinston Charter Academy

**New Jersey**  
Hoboken Charter School  
Princeton Charter School

**New Mexico**  
21st Century Public Academy  
Moreno Valley High School  
Taos Municipal Charter School

**New York**  
Amber Charter School  
EXPLORE Charter School  
Harlem Village Academy

**Ohio**  
Toledo School for the Arts

**Oklahoma**  
Western Village Academy Charter School

**Pennsylvania**  
Bear Creek Community Charter School  
Independence Charter School  
Laboratory Charter School of Communication and Languages  
Mathematics Science and Technology Community Charter School (MaST)  
Renaissance Academy-Edison Charter School

**Rhode Island**  
Paul Cuffee School

**South Carolina**  
Discovery School  
Greenville Technical Charter High School  
Midland Valley Preparatory School

**Texas**  
Cornerstone Academy  
Fort Worth Academy of Fine Arts  
Star Charter School

**Wisconsin**  
Whittier Elementary School

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*This announcement first appeared in Education Week on May 23, 2007  
reaching nearly 50,000 readers nationwide.*

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Secretary Spellings