

# THE Center for Education Reform



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For Immediate Release

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## CONGRESS PASSES PATHBREAKING EDUCATION BILL NEW OPTIONS FOR D.C. SCHOOLCHILDREN

**(Washington, DC 1/22/04)** With only sixteen percent of DC school children reading and able to do arithmetic at levels expected for their grade, Congress has created more opportunities for children to get a better education by passing the its annual appropriations bill for the District of Columbia. That spending bill, included in an omnibus spending bill that funds continuation of more than 11 agencies and programs, provides for scholarship of up to \$7,500 for as many as 1,700 disadvantaged DC school children, and provides the same funding for children attending both DC-based charter and traditional public schools.

The last time Congress passed a similar bill was in 1998, when a plan that enjoyed bi-partisan support was vetoed by then President Clinton. The Bush Administration has backed this plan, which was initiated by District Mayor Anthony Williams, City Councilman Kevin Chavous and School Board President Peggy Cooper-Cafritz, who have worked to advance the plan.

These local leaders were part of an often-contentious debate, which earned the support of most Republicans and many prominent Democrats, such as Senators Dianne Feinstein, Robert Byrd and Joe Lieberman.

During the last few weeks of the Congressional session, the bill's opponents at the headquarters of the National Education Association, People for the American Way and others rallied around members of Congress demanding that they oppose the final measure. Having passed the House earlier this year and with majority support in the Senate, the education plan for the District was included in the final conference report for the appropriations bills.



The District will be the fifth jurisdiction to enact a school choice program that involves both public, charter and private schools. The others are in Cleveland, Milwaukee, Florida and Colorado.

A constitutional challenge is expected.

Said CER president Jeanne Allen, "There is no question that DC's moms and dads want and need this program. This is the biggest education accomplishment in this city in twenty years and its leaders should be congratulated for being willing to stand up against enormous, establishment pressure to keep business as usual in the schools."

For statements by other education groups, local city leaders and federal supporters, go to CER's website at <http://www.edreform.com>.

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*CER is the leading authority for information on innovative reforms in education and works in states and communities across the country to advance the cause of educational excellence. For more information, contact CER at (202) 822-9000 or send e-mail to [cer@edreform.com](mailto:cer@edreform.com).*

