



Making Schools Work Better for all Children

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Quote for the Week: "I am not here to warm the seat, I am not a potted plant." -- *Interim Acting Schools Chancellor Harold O. Levy, New York City, upon announcing that for the first time the Chancellor would be involved in evaluating district superintendents.*

Offense or Defense? Georgia Governor Roy Barnes says eliminating teacher tenure is a key step in improving Georgia schools. Otherwise, he says, parents will demand to have vouchers, and that would cripple public schools.

The DoE's paternalism takes a lecturing! The House of Representatives held forth last week on the controversial endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education of ten fuzzy math programs. Experts told Congress that "the programs [chosen] kept children from learning important basic math skills and left them unprepared for higher course work."

A report by the state's Legislative Audit Bureau about the [Milwaukee, Wisconsin Parental Choice program](#) says that despite fears of creaming and segregation, choice is serving a population that is identical to the Milwaukee Public Schools. Most parents surveyed (71.1%) chose their private school because they believed it would provide higher educational standards. Other popular reasons for making the choice: good teachers (70.4%) and safe and orderly classrooms (67.8%). The report also notes that choice schools are located all over the city and have a wide range of religious and non-religious programs, that many schools participating in the program have well-established reputations for providing high-quality academic programs, and that most use some form of standardized testing or are independently accredited. "On the other hand," the report states, "there have been questions about the quality of programs in a small number of participating private schools." According to the audit, nine schools serving 366 choice pupils had no accreditation, were not seeking accreditation and administered no standardized tests. [Link to full report: ["An Evaluation: Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, February 2000"](#), Wisconsin Legislative Audit Bureau.]

The chance for [choice provides the impetus to improve Florida's schools](#). The FCATs, which help determine a school's grade under Gov. Jeb Bush's "A-Plus" plan, start in two weeks. Forest Park received an F on the tests last year, meaning students failed the reading, writing and math portions; a second F could make students eligible for vouchers to private schools. "We are anxious, but more confident than last year," fifth-grade teacher Nina Lant said, "We are much more prepared than we ever have been." Fourth- and fifth-graders at Forest Park practice for the FCAT for 1-1/2 hours each day. Fourth-graders are tested in reading and writing; fifth-graders are tested in math. Eighth- and tenth-graders will take statewide exams in mid-February. Thanks to extra money that the A+ program provided, Forest Park staffers have taken additional steps to improve student performance.

Another state is finally exercising due diligence in cracking down on failed public schools. **Maryland**, which since 1994 has had the ability to take over failing schools, has agreed to take over the state's three worst elementary schools. The State Board of Education has found three possible private groups to replace the current administrators as the schools' management team. They are: Edison Schools, Inc., Mosaica Education, Inc. and the Kennedy-Krieger Institute. These companies would sign contracts and, unlike their predecessors, would have to demonstrate success to stay in control. The local teachers union plans to challenge the action.



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