



Making Schools Work Better for all Children

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On this day that commemorates the birth of Martin Luther King, Jr., we should keep freedom and equality fresh in mind when looking at what's do be done for those not well served by our schools.

Several great accomplishments last week fit in with the move toward ensuring greater opportunity for all...

Yippee for **Arkansas**, which has had a rough time trying to eke out any charter schools under its law. Now, with some modest changes made and a new surge of effort, the state's first charter school was approved. The Grace Hill Elementary School in the Rogers School District is proposing to convert with more flexibility to restructure staffing and instruction. Four other schools are proposing conversion programs, and another nine proposals to create new charter schools are pending.

From the [Texas Public Policy Foundation](#) comes this news about a **Texas** State Board of Education vote last week to revoke a charter. TPPF said:

...it demonstrates the success of the education reform and charter school movement. It also points out a double standard. Unlike traditional schools, accountability for charter schools is swift and decisive. If parents are dissatisfied, they can remove their child. If the State Board is dissatisfied, they will revoke the school's charter.

Charter schools give parents more freedom to choose their child's education, and schools more freedom to teach. Freedom and accountability go hand in hand. The State Board is right to shut down bad charter schools and parents are right to select another school.

Well-known venture capitalist John Doerr holds similar views. "It's OK for charter schools to fail. We have to encourage risk-taking. That's what makes truly great entrepreneurs," he told a business audience at last week's Children's Scholarship Fund conference.

That conference brought together hundreds of committed business leaders and companies that are providing a wide variety of services to schools to help educate children.

Those companies, which include some of the leaders in providing instruction in hundreds of charter schools, illustrate that it's possible to teach children outside of the bureaucratic barriers that plague education. This is particularly true when one considers the latest research, released just last week in the Quality Counts 2000 publication, entitled "Who Should Teach," published by Education Week.

Among the findings is that eleven states have no basic skills testing requirement for teachers, and of the 39 that do require basic skills tests, 36 allow teachers in the classroom even if they haven't passed.

One in five novice teachers leave after 5 years, and generally, those who are less academically able go into teaching.

There's more bad news — none of which we relish. But it's also clear that no amount of advanced degrees and money will solve the exit and entry problem until more control is allowed at the school level and there are incentives and consequences for the progress of students, teachers and schools.

To deliver excellent educational opportunities requires excellent teachers, excellent programs and the direct participation by parents in making that happen.

As Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "Education must enable one to sift and weigh evidence, to discern the true from the false, the real from the unreal, and the facts from the fiction."

Let that be a guiding principle in choosing teachers, programs and schools for our children.

PROGRAM NOTE: For more on the subject of teacher quality, tune in **Thursday, January 20, 2000, 10 to 11 AM EST** to hear CER President Jeanne Allen on National Public Radio's Diane Rehm Show, discussing the efforts to attract and retain good teachers nationwide. The debate-style show will also feature a middle school teacher from Virginia, American Federation of Teachers President Sandra Feldman and Craig Jerald, Project Manager of Education Week's Quality Counts 2000 "Who Should Teach?" Check your local listings for times and availability, or [listen on-line](#), (if you can't tune in during the live show, check in any time to the NPR archives). Join the on-air conversation during the show by calling 1-800-433-8850.



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