



Making Schools Work Better for all Children

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* **CHARTER SCHOOLS:** National School Boards Association Executive Director Anne Bryant recently challenged our assertion that school boards use lawsuits to block that formation of charter schools. The problem is she forgot to send a copy of her letter to her members, who continue to file almost as many lawsuits as in the Florida recount process.

In Philadelphia, the school system (with the support of the local school board) is trying to block the approval of two charter applications that were denied on the local level, but approved at the state appeal level.

In Michigan, a lawsuit filed by Westwood Public Schools sought to block the Michigan charter school program by contending that the program caused racial segregation. Unfortunately for the Westwood Board, a new Detroit News analysis shows that charter schools are "clearly favored by minority parents."

Meanwhile in California, where the recently-passed Proposition 39 makes it easier for charter schools to obtain the capital improvement funding necessary to build schools and classrooms for their children, local school board members like Oakland's Noel Gallo are complaining that it "puts an extra burden on a public school system." His colleague, board member Jean Quan threatened that districts will "weigh the decision to grant charters more carefully than in the past."

We hope they'll get Ms. Bryant's letter about how local school boards aren't obstructionist real soon.

* **TRADITIONAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS:** Ms. Bryant, of course, says that local school boards are only exercising "oversight." She also argues that charter schools and traditional public schools should have the same standards.

Well, when a charter school mismanages finances, they are (deservedly) shut down. So what happens when the traditional public schools mismanage funds?

An audit of the Detroit public schools reveals that \$506,000 is missing from 29 audited schools and another \$124,000 was misspent. Although completed last year, not a single administrator has been disciplined and at least three principals accused of wrongdoing have been promoted. The audit revealed that Federal Title I funds for disadvantaged students were used to paint a school office, buy a coffee maker, a vacuum, and carpeting. More than \$50,000 in cafeteria receipts simply disappeared. And the principal at Henry Ford High School managed to get \$2,386 in reimbursement for his son's trip to Italy. He blames this on his lack of a bookkeeper.

So ... if charter schools and traditional public schools should meet the same standards, will Ms. Bryant favor shutting these schools down for financial mismanagement?

On a happier note, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has invested nearly \$7 million in a grant to the National Council of La Raza to help establish a network of charter schools serving Latino communities throughout California. The national La Raza group will work with the state's affiliates to establish 15 new charter schools (at least five of which will be high schools) in the next five years. Another score for the growing rainbow coalition supporting diverse forms of choice, speaking of which ...

* **SCHOOL CHOICE:** The Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO) has initiated a major TV and radio campaign in the Washington media market. Designed to inform opinion leaders about the benefits to families and society from school choice programs, the ads feature the real experts: parents and grandparents from cities where parents of low-income students and students at low-performing public schools receive educational tax dollars to enroll children in public or private schools.

The ads are outstanding, and we just hope chairman Howard Fuller saves some of the ad dollars to run them again on January 21, when folks from all over the country will be in town for the Inauguration of the next President – whoever he may be. Check out BAEO at:

<http://www.baeroonline.org>.

More choice results from the Election Day ground war: In **Pennsylvania**, where polls continue to show support for school choice, choice supporters prevailed in three key contests where the teachers union dumped a ton of money to defeat pro-choice legislators. In fact, choice supporters picked up two additional seats in House Districts 180 and 60.

* **TEACHERS:** In New York City last week, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani threaten to put Randi Weingarten, the teachers' union president, in jail if her union went on strike.

Seems the Mayor offered generous raises for teachers in exchange for doing things differently, including tying compensation to performance. The union agreed to meet him half-way: They'll take the raises, but won't change the way the system works. "The system is broken. It hurts children," said Giuliani, whose entreaties to finalize a union contract have been rebuffed at each turn.

Meanwhile, heard on the radio the same day, it was reported that a 4th grade teacher at PS 9 in the Bronx has missed 200 days of work between 1993 and this year. She was arrested 14 times during the period – for shoplifting. And, yes, she still got tenure.



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