



Making Schools Work Better for all Children

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CHARTERS: A New Jersey decision by a state-based Council on Local Mandates held that regional charters that draw children beyond one district are perfectly legitimate. But this Council granted the school boards that complained to them that charters should not be funded with local dollars as charters are a state-mandated program. This could mean losses of as much as 25% for many charter schools, and is a decision made with no consideration that charter schools are public schools and the students who attend them have a right to equitable public school monies. This will occupy policymaking bodies in the Garden state for weeks and months to come, as school boards try to guard what they perceive as "their" money and charters work to prove that funding should follow children, not systems.

The South Carolina Supreme Court stunned many observers last week when it threw the proverbial baby out with the bath water. The Court had been asked to rule on the racial balance provision of the state's 1996 charter law, which requires charters to mirror the racial balance of the district within 10%. Such a constraint has made it difficult for many interested charters to start, as they cannot guarantee a certain enrollment in the application phase and would have to drastically modify what constitutes the choice arrangement offered by charters. The SC State Supreme Court ruled that the entire law is unconstitutional, forcing the legislature to have to act immediately to reenact legislation so the state's eight and future charter schools can continue.

For more information, link to: [Major Charter School Rulings Issued in Two States](#).

CITY SWITCH: Educators have long called it the "dance of the lemons." News that District of Columbia school superintendent Arlene Ackerman is likely leaving to take on the same post in San Francisco was met with curious protests from city officials, who fear that DC schools will "backslide" without Ackerman. To her credit, Ackerman has in fact reconstituted some schools and instituted new standards and testing since she arrived in the Nation's Capital as its chief school officer. Despite some progress, schools haven't improved, huge gaps remain and she spent more than a month of this school year fighting over one tiny charter school conversion pushing to open. Ackerman has also had zero success in straightening out financial, transportation and basic administrative issues. She says she's been "frustrated" by such problems — and yet a CEO at a major company who cried frustration rather than solve the problems would likely be ousted by shareholders and not recycled to another company.

For more information, link to: [Ackerman's Fleeting Legacy](#), by Marc Fisher, *The Washington Post*, May 18, 2000.

TEACHERS: The push to put teachers on the kind of performance-based arrangements as most other employees in society already enjoy got a boost this week, at least in theory, from the accreditor of

teacher colleges. The group known as NCATE has traditionally accredited teacher education schools based on the look and feel of courses offered, not on the performance of prospective teachers the schools graduate. Now, NCATE plans to use some performance-based criteria in giving accreditation, although some suggest the bar they set may still be too low. For now it's inconsequential unless schools also hire and evaluate based on the quality of a teacher and not just the education received or hours logged. That's a concept that groups like NCATE once howled at in disgust, but the stakes are higher, the competition is becoming fierce and at long last it appears that those who have long argued for rewards by merit are dominating the minds of the American public.

CURRICULUM: The [Math Wars](#) continue raging in different parts of the nation, so it was bad news earlier this month when the Los Angeles Unified School district voted not to fix their math program in alignment with the state's new standards. Even Jaime Escalante weighed in. Escalante, the famed subject of the movie "Stand and Deliver" about his efforts as a math teacher in the barrio who proved that minority children can learn when they are given the proper curriculum and high expectations, wrote to the LA board that the "integrated math" being promoted to help mainly Hispanic students would put the children behind. "These kids need to have intelligent, guided practice in the content of mathematics... I assure you that if I had been obligated to use the integrated math currently used at Garfield High as my regular curriculum there would never have been a Stand and Deliver." For more information, visit [Math Wars](#) and www.mathematicallycorrect.com/. See also: [THE MATH MELTDOWN, If this is math, then we're at war](#), by Mark Clayton, *The Christian Science Monitor*, May 16, 2000.

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