



*Making Schools Work Better for all Children*

Newsire - May 23, 2000

May 23, 2000  
Vol. 2, No. 20

\* **TEACHERS:** If it looks like a duck, it might not be a duck, is apropos to the much-lauded move by the **Cincinnati** School District, where both union and management agreed upon a performance-based merit pay plan. But the details reveal that none of the new pay plan allows teachers to be evaluated on the basis of student performance, but rather uses the "peer review" concept unveiled last year by the National Education Association as their preferred method for ensuring quality gets rewarded.

A new survey of charter schools finds that the vast majority are headed by educators whose primary motivation for entering the charter school field is "to have an opportunity to achieve excellence," and "escape the constraints of traditional schools." Conducted by StandardsWork, a non-profit education consultancy, in cooperation with CER, the survey provides a profile of existing charter school principals that makes clear the kinds of arrangements these dynamic educators prefer. The survey was conducted as part of the launch of "Hire Standards," a non-profit executive search initiative designed to place charter school principals and reform-minded school superintendents nationwide. To get a copy of the survey or learn more about Hire Standards, visit their website at [www.hirestandards.org](http://www.hirestandards.org) or call them at 202-835-2000.

\* **ACHIEVEMENT:** For the seventh consecutive year, **Texas students** improved their achievement on the state's TAAS, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills. Among the highlights: Eighty percent of all students in grades 3-10 who were tested passed, compared to a rate of 78 percent last year. An increasing number of children were required to take the test, as the state tightened the exemption for limited English speaking students. This is one reason, it is believed, that third-grade pass rates dropped slightly. The best news comes from among African-American students, who at the fifth grade level, "increased their passing rates on all tests taken by six points," according to Texas Education Commissioner Jim Nelson.

This week, scores on the **Massachusetts C.A.S.** (Comprehensive Assessment System), will be released.

Great news from **Core Knowledge schools in Oklahoma City:** In a study comparing 300 Core Knowledge students with 300 students with identical demographic variables, Core Knowledge students made significantly greater gains in reading comprehension, vocabulary, science, math and social studies. According to E.D. Hirsch, Core Knowledge's founder, the magnitudes of these gains in equity and achievement will grow larger as the Core Knowledge students move through the grades. As an interesting side note, it was a parent leader at a Core Knowledge school in Oklahoma City that led the fight for charter schools in the Sooner State, precisely so that concept could be expanded to more children. For more information about the study, contact Gracy Taylor, Oklahoma City Public Schools,

405-297-6705. For further information on Core Knowledge, visit [www.coreknowledge.org](http://www.coreknowledge.org).

\* **SCHOOL CHOICE:** Of the 58 percent majority of **Massachusetts'** residents that support school choice, fully 57 percent self-described liberals support it. For more information, visit [www.pioneerinstitute.org](http://www.pioneerinstitute.org).

In **Florida**, 118 schools have signed up to participate in the state's opportunity scholarship program, meaning they have room and are willing to accept children whose schools rate an F for the second year in a row when the state's test scores are revealed this June. These schools are daring enough to join in a program that is under attack and the subject of a major lawsuit which makes the program's tenure fuzzy. The critics of course are attempting to make the 118 schools appear to be a drop in the bucket compared to the number that could sign up. The bottom line, however, is that most of the state's private schools are not in districts that are likely to have students eligible for opportunity scholarships. Private schools have sprung up in inner cities to serve disadvantaged children, but because they must fund a large proportion of each child's education themselves, they are unlikely to grow as quickly as those where money is not the object. Of course, having the opportunity to go to a school of choice is only now beginning to reach the poor and those in failing schools, thanks to Florida's pioneering program. That's not the spin that one hears from choice opponents. They'd rather criticize private schools for not participating rather than finding ways for more school opportunities for all children to grow.



The Center for Education Reform  
910 Seventeenth Street, NW, Suite 1120 • Washington, DC 20006  
800-521-2118 • 301-986-8088 • Fax: 301-986-1826  
[www.edreform.com](http://www.edreform.com) • [cer@edreform.com](mailto:cer@edreform.com)  
copyright © 2013