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PRESS RELEASE

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NATIONAL LEADERS APPLAUD WASHINGTON STATE CHARTER SCHOOL ACTION *After Nine-year Quest State Becomes 42nd to enact Charter Law*

Washington, D.C. National education reform leaders today praised the Washington State legislature for voting to adopt the nation's 42nd charter school law.

"It's been a long time in coming and it's taken a lot of struggle to get there, but it's finally done and for that Washington state lawmakers deserve our thanks," said Jeanne Allen, president and founder of the Center for Education Reform (CER). "But the lion's share of the credit should go the parents, business and community leaders, and editorial writers of the state's newspapers who through years of delays, setbacks and political wrangling, persisted in their demands for the substantive reforms and real educational alternatives that charters schools offer."

Leading the effort to support pro-charter legislators and citizens, and working diligently to provide them with information and resources, was the Education Excellence Coalition (EEC), founded by Jim and Fawn Spady, which has been recognized nationally for their long-term efforts to secure a charter law. (The EEC is a member of the CER Partners Program. The Spadys were also recipients, last October, of an award from CER honoring their work.)

Allen said that Washington's law was, on balance, a good one, and that it contains provisions that allow schools to be set up and perform with minimal intrusion. "Our studies show that strong charter laws make for strong charter schools. However, Washington's law will have to be thoroughly analyzed to determine whether it fits the strong-law profile."

(more)

“Observers are concerned, however” Allen said, about the provision that gives local districts the ‘right of first refusal’ over issuing charters, and the fact that, in some cases, they can hold up applications up to 105 days before reaching a decision. “Citizens will need to pay close attention to see if the districts use the provision responsibly, or if they use it as a means to stymie charter initiatives and frustrate hopes, especially in places like Seattle where the school board is on record as opposing charter schools,” said Allen.

If this continues to occur legislators should amend the law so it works as intended: to create new options and opportunities for families.

Charter school legislation has been introduced in the Washington legislature every year since 1995. The current bill was adopted on March 10, 2004, in the waning hours of the most recent legislative session. Governor Gary Locke has previously announced his support of the charter school legislation and is expected to sign the bill.

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News note. For more information about Washington State and its history concerning charter schools, go to: <http://www.WAcharterschools.org>. To contact them, call: 206-634-0589 or email JimSpady@aol.com.

News note. To see a ranking of the nation’s charter laws, go to: <http://www.edreform.com>

The Center for Education Reform is a national, independent, non-profit advocacy organization providing support and guidance to individuals, community and civic groups, policymakers and others who are working to bring fundamental reforms to their schools. For further information, please call (202) 822-9000 or visit our website at <http://edreform.com>.