



*Making Schools Work Better for all Children*

Newsire - January 3, 2001

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**Vol. 3, No. 1 \* CHARTER SCHOOLS:** And in the real new millennium, some things old are new again: In New York, the first public elementary school in the nation to offer separate instruction for boys and girls just received unanimous approval by the New York State Board of Regents. Under this innovative single-sex design, the Brighter Choice Charter School for Girls and the Brighter Choice Charter School for Boys will be housed under one roof in Albany, NY and share a principal and teaching faculty. Aimed at at-risk children, students will be taught by subject-based teachers, instead of generalist grade teachers, benefit from a longer school day and school year, begin Spanish instruction in Kindergarten, require school uniforms, and administer standardized tests in every grade and every major subject. The schools have been organized by the founders of A Brighter Choice Scholarships, an innovative school-choice initiative financed by Virginia Manheimer (the former Virginia Gilder) providing scholarships to students attending Albany's worst-performing public school.

Most educators finally acknowledge the learning and behavioral differences between boys and girls (See "[Snakes and Snails and Puppy Dog Tails, Is that What Little Boys are Made Of?](#)") which is why so many private schools are single-sex. This school will finally give at-risk children those same opportunities. Individuals interested in applying for the principal and teacher positions, or providing philanthropic support, should contact Tom Carroll, of the Brighter Choice Charter Schools, at (518) 383-2977. **\* TECHNOLOGY:** In the new millennium, a brand new idea has some very traditional roots. Former Education Secretary Bill Bennett has become chairman of a new company, K12, that will combine back-to-basics education with the next wave of computer technology. Billing itself as the first national Internet-based school for K-12 students, the founders include financier Michael Milken and his brother, Lowell Milken, and Larry Ellison, of the Oracle Corporation. The curriculum will use aspects of E.D. Hirsch's "Core Knowledge," incorporate a phonics-based early reading program, and base its arithmetic instruction on a highly respected math curriculum and the rigorous California math standards. Meanwhile, the company's chief technology advisor is Yale University computer scientist David Gelernter, who has questioned the use of computers in the classroom – thus ensuring that the emphasis will be on content, not glitz. For more information see "[Keeping Technology in Perspective](#)" from the September 2000 issue of Parent Power!.

The company is aiming at the fastest-growing group in American education: children who do some or all of their learning at home, at work-sites, or through extra-curricular coursework to supplement a conventional school, including home-schoolers, distance-learners, and American students abroad. **\* SCHOOL CHOICE:** Reports concerning the death of vouchers are greatly exaggerated. These reports are emanating from political writers in the media who assume that because there's talk of scaling back a modest choice component of the overall Bush education initiative, it means that Republicans are backing off, having been depressed or otherwise discouraged by the failure of fall choice initiatives and one recent court ruling against choice. The reality is that the Bush campaign never promoted vouchers as a single issue, but rather, as a last ditch effort for parents whose children were in schools found to be failing. There's

no question that the Bush team believes choice is important; they just don't believe it's the one reform that will alone move mountains. But then, neither do most active reformers. Just yesterday, according to Reuters: "Bush transition spokesman Ari Fleischer said the president-elect will stand by the voucher plan. He denied a *Washington Post* report that the plan was likely to be dropped. 'That will be part of the agenda -- the proposals -- that he (Bush) puts before the Congress and he is going to work hard to enact school choice into law,' Fleischer said. "Fleischer insisted Bush will stand firm on his campaign pledge to offer vouchers to parents. 'It's one of the strongest ways we have to help educate our children and to give parents options, especially for those who may attend schools that are failing our children,' Fleischer said. 'He (Bush) campaigned on those ideas, including school choice, because he thinks they are right for the country.'" Meanwhile, it's important to note that even if people in Washington did "back off" vouchers, the impact is minimal at best. The suggestion that vouchers will rise or fall based on action in Washington is wishful thinking on the part of opponents. School choice has always progressed from the grassroots and only efforts that start at the grassroots and focus on the total school picture succeed. Support for such proposals is on the rise, and failing ballot initiatives are more a result of the initiative process than they are of the concept of choice. \*

**EDUCATION SECRETARY** Designate Rod Paige is being closely scrutinized by the public, and as you may recall from our [pre-New Year newswire](#), Paige is an avid reformer, who doesn't appear to shy from any proposals that help kids. If this Administration, true to Fleischer's words, focuses on kids rather than systems, than it's likely it will be a whole different culture for education that pervades Washington in the coming months. Today on [excite.com](#), exit poll results for vouchers are running ahead by ten points. Add your voice to the mix by taking the poll yourself at <http://www.excite.com>.



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