



Making Schools Work Better for all Children

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Vol. 3, No. 5 There's mostly good news this week, and it's all about [charter schools](#) – from approvals for new opportunities to rising test scores.

* **NEW YORK:** The State University of New York Board of Trustees has approved seven new public charter schools, to be located in Queens, the South Bronx, Harlem, Troy, and Buffalo. True to the notion that charters should represent the variety and innovation that helps different children learn in ways that suit their styles best, the seven new schools include those emphasizing Back to Basics and phonics, English/Spanish Immersion, the Core Knowledge curriculum, and Howard Gardner's "multiple intelligences." Operators range from non-profits to for-profit firms like Edison and Mosaica. New York, which was a long-time waiting for its charter law, is now making up for lost time, with 39 approved schools.

Some believe that additional schools, such as a parent-led proposal in Mount Vernon, should have also gotten the green light. But authorities are moving cautiously, and invite applicants to re-apply. See the approval press release at <http://www.newyorkcharters.org>.

* **MARYLAND:** In Maryland, many parent groups are gearing up for what they hope will be a successful legislative session for charter schools. Consigned to very weak proposals in the past, there is some evidence building that legislators may listen this time to the cries of parents in a state where more than half of the students do not have a basic command of the subjects they study, according to Maryland's own MSPAP exams. To that end, many parents are rallying in the legislature's Joint Legislative Hearing Room in Annapolis on Thursday, February 1, at 4:00 p.m. to get their point across.

* **FEDERAL POLICY:** President Bush and Senator Lieberman weren't the only ones to release education proposals last week. A federal policy working group – with 19 representatives from major charter states – has been formed to present a more organized and united front whenever possible. Their first group of proposals made recommendations for federal initiatives on charter facilities financing, and one of them has already been introduced by Senator Tom Carper (D-DE).

* **SOUR NOTE:** A battle continues to brew in San Francisco, where the local School Board seems determined to yank back the Edison Academy, a charter school carrying the same name as the professional school management company now running it. As noted in [last week's Newsire](#), since Edison took over the school, test scores have skyrocketed – including one jump that saw fifth graders go from two percent performing at grade level to 35 percent. What do the teachers say? Julian Hoffman, a teacher at Edison Academy who has taught in places like Harlem, NY and East Palo Alto, CA, notes: "Edison has a top notch administration and a comprehensive and challenging curriculum

that is allowing our children to succeed."

Success, however, appears not to be the primary criterion for the San Francisco School Board. For more information see: <http://www.examiner.com/news/default.jsp?story=edison.0125>

* **MAILBAG:** Our mail this month brings a batch of newsletters and press reports about charter schools and their test scores – reports that would ... well, make a San Francisco School Board member cringe. In the midst of repeated claims by the education establishment that charters are not improving academic performance come reports from places like –

SONOMA CHARTER SCHOOL, which scored the highest of any of the schools in Sonoma Valley on the state's recent standardized test report, becoming one of three district schools to merit a monetary bonus. The SCS has a waiting list of 300 and uses a lottery to fill open seats.

CHARTER SCHOOL OF WILMINGTON, in Delaware, whose students took state tests for science and social studies for the first time last spring, as a measurement of student progress toward meeting the Delaware state content standards. CSW had the highest score in the state in every category of the tests, including life science, earth science, physical science, science inquiry, civics, economics, geography, and history.

WHITE PINE ACADEMY, in Leslie, Michigan, uses the SRA Direct Instruction for reading and Saxon Math for math – two programs often dismissed by the education establishment. The results speak for themselves: Students who took the TerraNova Achievement Test in fall 1999 and again in spring 2000 gained 1.83 years academically. Students who tested behind the national average in the fall were well above the national average by spring in nearly all grades.



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