



*Making Schools Work Better for all Children*

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- **CHARTERS:** Cyber charter schools are receiving lots of attention these days, and for good reason. It seems as if everywhere they spring up, families flock to this educational option. Often parent choices have to do with curriculum, the ease of teaching, frustration with children evaluated for seat time over learning, and more. But no matter what the reason, school boards groups like those in Pennsylvania aren't interested. Rather than support the individual boards who have approved these arrangements, the PA school boards association sued following the approval in Norristown of a cyber school using the K12 curriculum founded by William J. Bennett, former education secretary and drug czar. The lawsuit has caused education establishment-friendly lawmakers like education committee chairman Jess Stairs to introduce a bill in the legislature requiring the state to set aside funds for cyber-schools rather than allow money to move with the child from the district to the school of choice. That would appease the PSBA, which of course, is important if you're the legislator they work to reelect every two years! Never mind the lowly parents, whose children go to those schools or the taxpayers that the PSBA wants to pay twice for the same child.

\* When Massachusetts lifted its charter cap to 120, it had the intended effect of inviting more applicants who now believed they had a chance to compete for more than a handful of slots. Thus it's welcome news that 27 groups have proposed new charter designs, and by October 19 they'll know if they are invited to continue in the process. For more on this go to:

[www.masslive.com/springfield/unionnews/index.ssf?/](http://www.masslive.com/springfield/unionnews/index.ssf?/) and click on "Links and Archives" for September 28, 2001.

\* Over in New York, the local school board is still trying to make life miserable for the Roosevelt, NY Children's Academy Charter School - which this year had 142 applications for 42 openings. Roosevelt is a unique situation and the ONLY district in New York that has failed to pass through the money that is owed to a charter school. The district has a history of educational failure and fiscal mismanagement - so bad that the state commissioner has openly discussed a state takeover or district-wide charter. They vehemently opposed the school and are currently in the midst of a lawsuit with the State University of New York over the Roosevelt charter's approval. Interestingly, they cannot make payments to the school for the education of children within the district, but they can make payments to their litigators.

- **STANDARDS:** "An Indiana school with only half of its students passing state tests will be labeled as making acceptable progress, under a weakened accountability plan approved Wednesday by the Governor's Education Roundtable." So begins a depressing article in the Indianapolis Star outlining how the bar has been lowered in Indiana despite evidence that raising expectations raises achievement.

Interestingly, it was the educators on the panel that pushed the new, lowered accountability levels, while members of the state's business community were in favor of raising the bar. They have since agreed that they will not support the plan nor help lobby for its passage should the State Board of Education agree with the panel's recommendation. For more, go to:  
<http://indystar.com/print/articles/govtable27.html>.

- **EDUCATION SUMMIT:**When the governors and some of the nation's business leaders meet next week for their third education summit and photo-op, some are asking if they'll have the courage to stand up and point out such contradictions as the one highlighted above. Since these summits began happening (the first was 1989, with subsequent summits in 1996 and 1999), governors and business leaders have declared victory for standards. It's the same song and dance each time. They convene, they resolve to fight bad education, their supporters and staff write speeches claiming they've made good progress, and after they've returned home, these same executives allow the education groups to take over the agenda and water down any attempt at real education.

Meanwhile, little talk is ever devoted to the kind of reform that really pressures systems to succeed. Florida Governor Jeb Bush could address how that's worked in his state with the state's A-plus Accountability and choice plan, as could Michigan's Governor John Engler about charter school schools. Former Delaware governor turned US Senator Tom Carper could also instruct those convened about how his approach to having standards and choice at the same time created real pressures and raised expectations.

- **KIDS KNOW BETTER:**Metropolitan Life Insurance Company today released a survey that underscores the low state of academic standards and expectations. Fifty-six percent of secondary school principals and only 39 percent of teachers strongly agree that teachers in their school have high expectations for all students. And sixty-seven percent of secondary school principals but only 48 percent of teachers strongly believe that their school provides curricula that is challenging to students.

Teachers know they're not doing the job. More importantly, the students know it: Only 25 percent of students strongly agree that their school has high expectations; only 23 percent describe their classes as very challenging. The survey demonstrates that students understand that they could be getting a whole lot better education than they are. To see a copy of the MetLife survey, go to [www.metlife.com](http://www.metlife.com).

- **EDUCATION SECRETARY ROD PAIGE** -- a former urban school superintendent and local school board member - told a group of reformers gathered in Atlanta this week that choice is the next great battle on the education front, following passage of the President's education reform package. He suggested that even the small amount of choice present in the education bill will have an impact, and it's impossible to back up from going down the choice road: "The genie is out of the bottle on choice."



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