



Making Schools Work Better for all Children

Newsire - October 23, 2001

October 23, 2001

Vol. 3, No. 40

PHILADELPHIA: The Philadelphia Board of Education would be abolished and management of that city's school system turned over to Edison Schools under a proposal provided to Mayor John Street by Governor Mark Schweiker. Edison, which was hired by the state to evaluate the city school system, also proposed that 60 of the city's lowest-performing schools be freed from central control and operated by private managers. The final report will be presented by October 31, and if the Governor and Mayor cannot agree on a plan by November 30, the state will take over the city schools.

School board members, who would be replaced by a five-member commission as provided under a 1998 law, decried the plan as "pushing change for change's sake," although it's more likely that the change was necessitated by failures of the school board's regime.

While reformers are excited by prospects for change, many wonder whether Edison has yet achieved the capacity to successfully manage such an ambitious plan. Then again, the City of Brotherly Love hasn't exactly been a bastion of efficiency, given its expected \$1.5 billion deficit and its massive education deficits as well. One additional recommendation Governor Schweiker should consider is allowing successful private schools in Philadelphia to open their doors and educate children with public support as they have been doing successfully in Milwaukee and Cleveland. With the strong possibility of a Supreme Court decision this term validating such scholarship programs, Pennsylvania might want to get ready to take advantage of the opportunity. Read the story at <http://inq.philly.com/>.

WHILE NERO FIDDLES, ROME BURNS: But even as scores decline and deficits loom over the state's largest city, the Pennsylvania School Boards Association (PSBA) is focusing its attention on stifling the most recent set of opportunities for children in the Keystone State -- cyber charter schools. A new PSBA report argues that the children who attend charter schools -- particularly cyber charter schools -- should not be paid for from the funds that pay for public education in general, and that the state should create a separate pool of money. PSBA complains that home school parents, who pay taxes to support local education, should not have the right to choose public charter schools located in their district -- even though the purpose of these public schools is no different from that of district schools.

Of course, charter schools have to attract parents willing to send their children there and must perform to stay in business, which is the crux of PSBA's real complaint: They want control of the money, where it will stay in the same system, regardless of whether the job gets done.

CALLING THEIR BLUFF: Opponents of school choice argue that students using government scholarships should be subject to the same evaluations as traditional public schools. So why aren't they rushing to support the idea when it's put on the table by choice supporters?

Howard Fuller, Founder of the Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO), has proposed that Wisconsin track for 10 years the progress of students receiving publicly financed scholarships for tuition at private schools, as well as students in public schools, and report on that progress annually. Voucher students would take the same tests public school students take, and the Legislative Audit Bureau would oversee the program.

But the Wisconsin Education Association quashed the idea, calling in chits to get it slashed from the state's budget bill. Choice supporters are urging Governor Scott McCallum and state schools superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster to resurrect the idea, which would help answer the question of how well kids in so-called "voucher schools" are doing. Read the story [by clicking here](#).

NEW YORK HEROS: New York's firefighters have a deserved reputation for heroism after September 11, but their vision for saving the community long preceded that date. Members of the Vulcan Society, an organization of black firefighters, had been working for some time on the development of a charter school in the city. That dream continues to live on and school organizers will be hosting a fundraising dinner on November 29, with proceeds divided between the Vulcan Society Charter School initiative and the Teamsters National Black Caucus Charter School initiative. Funds will be used for a facility to house the schools, to cover planning and start-up costs, and contribute to a memorial. Individual tickets are \$100. Among those to be honored will be a member of the charter school committee, Captain Vernon Richard, Missing In Action since September 11, 2001. For ticket information, contact dinner co-sponsors at the Toussaint Institute Fund, at (212) 865-5057.



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