



*Making Schools Work Better for all Children*

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\* **CHARTERS:** New Jersey's charter schools received a boost with the release of a favorable report on the charter movement there. Education Commissioner Vito Gagliardi offered a series of recommendations including more support for charter facilities financing, technical assistance and increased relief from mandates. The report notes substantial progress by charter students on the statewide assessment, as well as high satisfaction levels from parents and students. You can see the report [by clicking here](#).

Meanwhile, in Michigan, legislative leaders there have failed to agree on whether to lift the cap that has limited the number of innovative charter schools over the past two years, so they've passed the buck to an eight-person panel to be headed by Michigan State University President Peter McPherson. Although 150 charters have been authorized by universities, none have been chartered by the institution McPherson heads, raising questions about any predisposition he might hold.

Indianapolis Mayor Bart Peterson has moved quickly in his new role as a charter school authorizer under Indiana's new charter law. Monday marked the close of the Mayor's first application process and 21 applications were submitted for the five slots allotted to the Mayor annually under the law. Mayor Peterson has 60 days to review applications, make recommendations and award the charters.

\* **ACCOUNTABILITY:** For the first time, Pennsylvanians are able to compare student achievement and expenses on line, thanks to the most recent report issued by financial analyst giant Standard and Poor's. Data for the state's 501 school districts has been put on line at [www.ses.standardandpoors.com](http://www.ses.standardandpoors.com), providing schools, parents and taxpayers a tool allowing them to compare their district records with comparable districts. Hired by the Pennsylvania Department of Education to provide an independent assessment, the S&P numbers cover 1996 to 1999 and will be updated each year to become more current. S&P has also posted data on Michigan, and the program is expected to expand.

\* **FEDERAL POLICY:** The "era of cooperation" may be over, as last week the National Conference of State Legislators withdrew their support for President Bush's education plan. Writing to the U.S. House and Senate Leadership, the letter blasts several key components of the plan, starting with annual testing, and ending with a demand for more money. Instead of proposing to work to find common ground, the NCSL simply withdraws its support for accountability measures in favor of reverting to the tired old programs that throw more money at the problem but have never been proven effective: teacher certification, class size reductions, non-educational pre-school programs and facilities.

\* **TESTING:** The NCSL could find the rationale for annual testing, however, in a wide range of results from across the country. In California, just 34 percent of ninth-graders passed both parts of that state's exit exam, with 75 percent of Los Angeles ninth graders failing the math section. In Maryland, a state-commissioned study proposed adding tests for grades four, six and seven to help the state measure student performance. And in Kentucky, the results of the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System are used to judge whether a school is making progress toward its target of educating all children. Schools that make progress are rewarded; those that don't improve receive state assistance in a variety of forms.

Interestingly, a report in the National Journal underscores how standardized tests are helping teachers. Newer teachers like Dana Hevener of Virginia's Beverley Manor Elementary School credit that state's Standards of Learning tests "with not only giving her direction, but also encouraging teachers in her school to work together." Even veteran teachers like Theresa Guillory of Great Bridge High School in Chesapeake, Virginia noted that, "If you're teaching the kids effectively, they're going to do well on most standardized tests." Contrary to the charge by National Education Association President Bob Chase that standardized tests are an "instructional straitjacket," teachers are increasingly finding that tests provide guidance they didn't receive before.

\* **TEACHERS:** Most teachers focus their attention on education matters, and rightly expect their "representatives" in the school employee unions to do the same. But a new report by the Education Intelligence Agency points up how the National Education Association is often diverted to other issues - from abortion to energy policy to nuclear freeze to disassociating themselves from the Boy Scouts of America. Teachers who want to see why the NEA might well stand for "National Everything Association" should check <http://members.aol.com/educationintel/>.

\* **CHOICE:** A General Accounting Office report released last week on publicly-funded vouchers excludes and marginalizes studies that found gains and achievement by voucher students, ignoring issues of parental satisfaction and competition created by vouchers. The report also ignores the mounting data from studies of private voucher programs.

Nevertheless, the GAO could not ignore some clear statistics repudiating charges by choice opponents of "creaming" and "balkanization," The report verified that family income for voucher students is less than that of district public school student families (by up to half) and that students using voucher programs are less racially segregated than students in the traditional public schools. The report also notes that voucher students enter the programs with lower achievement than public school counterparts and that they had smaller class sizes (which the Education Establishment has always argued is a good thing).



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