



*Making Schools Work Better for all Children*

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\* **DROP-OUTS:** New report issued by the Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO) reveals the real dropout rates which are worse than many may have imagined. These numbers - while readily available - have been masked in government and education group reports. The BAEO report looks at the number of students in eighth grade, adjusts for population changes, and notes the number that actually graduated in 12th grade. Unlike government reports, BAEO does not include in graduation rates those students receiving an "equivalent" credential, such as a GED, who often years later are included in graduation rates for that year. Graduation is graduation; it doesn't mean one dropped out and took a basic skills test and is now a high school graduate. Thanks to BAEO for its important data analysis.

BAEO points out that: Wisconsin has an African-American graduation rate of only 40 percent, and six other states also have black graduation rates of less than 50 percent. Georgia graduates only 32 percent of Latino students, and seven other states also graduate less than half of their Latino students. Among the 50 largest school districts, five have graduation rates of less than 50 percent, but 15 graduate less than half of their black students and 21 graduate less than half of their Latino students.

In the meantime, the nation's largest school employee union, the National Education Association, has announced new alliances through its Hispanic outreach effort. It plans to promote effective educational programs within the Hispanic community. Maybe they can start with a look at the dropout rate.

To see the entire dropout report, go to BAEO News at [www.baeo.org](http://www.baeo.org)

\* **CHOICE:** The mere state of education for Hispanics is one reason that the Hispanic Council for Reform and Educational Options signed on to CER's amicus brief urging the High Court to support educational options for all children as practiced currently in the Cleveland Scholarship Program case.

An additional 26 business, civic and educational groups joined CER in asking the Court to reverse the lower court decision on the basis that, as Justice Sandra Day O'Connor has stated in another case, context is important in reviewing state action. The context offered to the Court is 25 years of failed efforts to improve Cleveland's schools, including a large number of alternative public school options. Providing additional justification for the brief, the aforementioned dropout report notes that only 28 percent of Cleveland's students graduate at the end of their school career.

To view the CER Amicus, [click here](#)

\* **UNIONS:** The school employee unions claim to support their members - except, we guess, when they take their own members to court for trying to help kids. The Syracuse Teachers Association has filed a complaint that would end an effort by its own members to provide extra classes to assist failing middle school students. In one school, three teachers teach an extra period without extra pay. The union filed a grievance. At another school, sixth grade teachers volunteered to teach an extra period for no additional pay to keep classes small and give pupils more class time. The union complained, and the program ended. The official position of the union is that this will "help" the students by preventing the teachers from being spread thin. The unofficial position of the parents? "People are losing sight of the fact that we're in the business of educating children," said one parent whose child is getting the needed extra help.

\* **CHOICE, II:** The state of Maine has had school choice options for decades, and the taxpayers of Lewiston recently affirmed that they want to continue spending money on private education. In last Tuesday's election, 80 percent of Lewiston voters voted to continue paying for transportation, some secular textbooks and a portion of testing and school nursing services for young people who attend private and parochial schools in the city. Those arguing that the arrangement saves the city money since it costs less to help students in private schools than it does to educate them in public institutions (and also keeps class size down) won the vote by 6,412 to 1,140.

\* **ACCOUNTABILITY:** In fighting the Edison Charter Academy in San Francisco, the local school board made much of their demand of "accountability." But judging from a recent review of records, the word appears alien to the school system there. Although voters approved \$337 million for facility improvements over the last four years, a San Francisco Chronicle review reports that as much as \$100 million of the funds were used "to support a sprawling bureaucracy and to finance ill-conceived construction projects that ran far over budget or were never mentioned to voters.... as much as \$68 million was spent on salaries for non-teaching employees, including several officials who are now the focus of corruption investigations." The fraud was discovered by new Superintendent Arlene Ackerman, who directed an audit of the facilities department, and noted "Documents had been destroyed or were missing. Decisions were made that were clearly outside of what voters had approved."

To review the Chronicle report, [click here](#)

\* **JUST RELEASED from CER:** The 5th Annual Charter Laws Across the States: Ranking Scorecard and Legislative Profiles providing rankings and legislative profiles of the nation's 38 charter school laws. Go to: [charter school page](#).



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