



Making Schools Work Better for all Children

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It's Christmas week and we've fallen a bit behind with our updates. But here, for the last time in 1999, is a quick run-down of what's happening in reform as we close out the year. (More can be found in our [December Monthly Letter to Friends](#), which is now available on the web and will be in mailboxes any day now.)

We start in the northeast, where the last couple of weeks have seen a massive assault on charter schools by the New Jersey Education Association. Apparently the legislature's payback to the NJEA for a good election this year was to allow several bills to be considered, all which would reduce charter funding or curb enrollment in some way. The cap in NJ expires next month, and the NJEA wants to make permanent the 135 schools permitted, as well as give districts more charter funding to keep. It promises to be an interesting few months in the Garden State.

But the message of choice and accountability is indeed getting through. National Urban League president Hugh Price — for the third year in a row — implored his members to think like reformers and urged that all the nation's urban schools be turned into independently-run charter schools. He also said school boards have failed urban minorities, which, of course, means Mr. Price has also been reading the Monthly Letter to Friends <grin>.

Then again, so has the Democratic Leadership Council, who is obviously reading the tea leaves and realizing it's time for bold action and an end to needless commissions and councils. The DLC says "the first step is for Democrats to stop letting the public education establishment wrap the current arrangements in the flag of public education and to stop opposing school reform ideas just because some Republicans like them."

Of course, it's only "some Republicans" who like them. When it comes to education reform, politics is a mixed bag.

That's clear from Michigan, where enough Republicans failed to vote for Governor John Engler's proposal to lift the cap on charter schools. The Michigan Education Association is touting the charter loss as their victory, because they decided to begin giving Republicans money too, in the last election. Of course, if you can be bought and paid for by the special interests and put them ahead of children's needs, it doesn't matter what your party is because principles don't matter anyway. Let's hope Michigan voters remember that next year.

In Washington, DC, the school district continues to play havoc with charter schools and hopes to be able to steal the charter schools' thunder by putting their own "charters" into the buildings that some conversion charters had hoped for.

In Florida, the education establishment was last seen petitioning the State Board of Education to change the grading system by which schools are judged to alleviate the possibility this spring that as many as 30,000 children will be eligible for vouchers. One of the ways the school boards and superintendents propose that the state judge schools is by asking children how well they think they are educated and their own "expressed confidence" in their possession of significant skills." Geez – and these folks are in charge?

Thanks for checking into CER's Hotline. We wish all of you a very Merry Christmas and a safe, healthy and happy New Year! We'll be back in the new millennium, but in the meantime, be sure to surf our website for regular updates.

Happy Holidays!



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