



Making Schools Work Better for all Children

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* **CHARTER STUDIES:** Three reports, including one to be released tomorrow, exhibit clearly the accomplishments of charter schools, particularly in the area of student achievement. Advantage Schools will release tomorrow the results of standardized tests at their schools, and the report will be found at www.advantage-school.com.

A new report conducted by Western Michigan University on Pennsylvania charter schools is good news for charter supporters and bad news for charter opponents. Among the findings of the report, entitled "Autonomy in Exchange for Accountability: An Initial Study of Pennsylvania Charter Schools": charters are smaller, serve more at-risk students and more minority students than do traditional schools; although trailing traditional public schools on standardized test exams, they are improving at a higher rate and closing the gap; the number of students on waiting lists is equal to 45 percent of current enrollment; and 66 percent of charter parents believe the schools are serving their children's needs left unmet by the traditional public schools. To read the full report, go to: www.wmich.edu/evalctr/charter/pa_reports.

The study destroys the arguments that charters "cream" the best students and do not result in increased academic achievement. It verifies many of the conclusions made in a Goldwater Institute report released last week of Arizona charters. That report, possibly the most comprehensive charter study ever conducted involving nearly 60,000 students, showed that charter school students are making greater gains in reading and are making about the same gains in math as students in comparable traditional public schools. The Arizona study accounted for race, gender, grade level, absenteeism, English proficiency, mobility and other factors. The Arizona study also concluded that while mobility has a negative effect on student achievement, mobility within the charter sector is usually better than stability in a district school.

* **CHOICE:** Parents in Florida concerned about overcrowding in their schools may have another alternative next year, if legislation approved by the Florida House last week is approved by the Senate and signed into law. Students at any school where enrollment exceeds 120 percent of capacity would qualify for a \$3,000 grant to help pay tuition at a private school. Because the \$3,000 voucher is less than the average amount spent on most schoolchildren in public schools, such a law would not only siphon off some children from crowded schools but would also result in a fiscal gain for the public schools. The bill has not yet seen action in the Senate. To follow the bill's progress go to: www.leg.state.fl.us/session/index.cfm.

* **CHARTER RE-REGULATION:** The unions are working overtime to rid their public schools of pesky impediments. Not impediments like bad curriculum, bad teaching practices or bureaucracy, but rather those outside forces that may actually improve their schools. Nowhere is this more clear than in the nation's third largest state -- New York. Right now, no less than 17 bills are pending in the state legislature that would curb or restrict charter schools even further than state law currently does. Among the proposals: Making charter schools subject to school board reviews, requiring collective bargaining across the board for all employees in all schools, requiring majority of voters to approve state approvals on charters, reducing charter school funding, prohibiting for-profits and more.

The California Association of Network Charters (CANEC) -- that state's association of charter schools -- has vowed to fight similar rollback attempts. The 8th Annual CANEC Conference just held in Burbank included workshops dealing specifically with pending legislation and the need for the grassroots to form a strong coalition to block any legislative attempt to re-regulate charter schools. CANEC has made it a top priority to be proactive and stave off anti-charter initiatives designed to further erode the flexibility that have helped make charters successful.

* **CHARTER SCHOOLS WEEK:**

One way to ensure that charters remain free of political power grabs is to show the public their successes. The upcoming National Charter Schools Week on April 30-May 4 will be a nationwide festival of the benefits and leadership charters have shown nationwide. Among the activities will be local and statewide conferences and tours, and school-based celebrations. Schools looking for ideas should check out the fabulous spread done by the Charter Friends National Network, who has helped coordinate the state groups sponsoring the week at www.charterfriends.org/csweek.html website.

* Finally, CER is pleased to announce that the Congressional Salute to Charter Schools will be chaired by Senators Judd Gregg and Joseph Lieberman, and Representatives John Boehner and Tim Roemer. Included in that Salute will be special proclamations, school visits and other national treats. If you haven't done so already, Visit a Charter School Today!

* **PRIVATE/PUBLIC PARTNERSHIPS:** A ground-breaking decision in Pennsylvania will result in transferring control of the entire Chester Upland school system to three private firms, including one which will run its schools as charters in partnership with the local teachers union. The decision to transfer was made by the state-appointed board running the district because of its low performance: More than two-thirds of Chester Upland children failed last year's state tests in math and reading, and an estimated 40 percent of the system's students drop out while only 30 percent of the graduates go on to post-secondary education. The three firms chosen are LearnNow Inc., Mosaica Education, Inc. and Edison Schools, Inc. The decision, made after public meetings with prospective providers, has sparked support from the school community.

* **REPLACEMENT NAMED:** Pennsylvania Governor Tom Ridge has named his Policy Director, Charles Zogby, to replace Secretary of Education Eugene Hickok, who has been named Under Secretary of Education by President George W. Bush. Zogby has worked closely with Hickok and is expected to carry on, and expand, the programs he began.



