



*Making Schools Work Better for all Children*

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\* **FEDERAL POLICY:** Two major Senate amendments are up this afternoon, affecting both charter schools and choice policy.

The amendment offered by Senators Tom Carper (D-DE) and Judd Gregg (R-NH) includes several important provisions on charter school facilities financing: increasing funding to \$200 million in FY2002, authorizing federal incentive matching grants to states to start or expand per-pupil facilities aid programs, and clarifying the tax-exempt status of interest paid by charter schools.

A separate amendment introduced by Senator Judd Gregg would create a low-income school choice demonstration project, enabling ten cities in three states to provide low-income parents with the opportunity to send their children to the public or private school of their choice. The amendment includes a mandatory evaluation of the effects of choice programs.

All U.S. Senators may be reached by calling (202) 224-3121.

\* **ELECTIONS:** CER will be watching the off-year gubernatorial elections in New Jersey and Virginia for signs of reform-minded candidates. So far, here's what we know -

\* In Virginia, the Republican candidate for Lt. Governor Jay Katzen has been a long-time supporter of educational tax credits. Both he and the GOP gubernatorial candidate, Mark Earley, whose children attend public schools, took the opportunity in speaking before a business organization to support "more choices for poor students," although the nature of those choices was not made clear. Earley was also the primary sponsor of Virginia's charter school law. The Democratic candidate for Governor, Mark Warner, began as an opponent to charter schools but more recently has turned around to support greater competition to existing public schools. Warner, whose children attend private schools, opposes vouchers for poor children.

\* In New Jersey, a primary offers Republicans a choice between long-time school choice supporter and charter school advocate Bret Schundler, Jersey City's Mayor; and former Congressman Bob Franks, who has expressed his support for charter schools and choice "if approved by the voters." The Democratic candidate, Woodbridge Mayor Jim McGreevey was a sponsor of charter school legislation as a state senator, but opposes school choice.

New Jersey and Virginia voters can review CER's "[Candidate Education Meter](#)," a set of questions to

ask candidates.

\* **CHARTERS:** In Pennsylvania, State Representative Dwight Evans is proposing the conversion of 16 Philadelphia public schools into a network of charter schools. His idea has won support from Drexel University's Foundations, Inc., the Teachers College at Columbia University and the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and officials have been encouraging. "What we are attempting to do is something that has never been done in the history of this city," notes Evans. "It requires a different way of thinking." Teachers College President Arthur Levine, who is a recent convert to school choice has indicated that the college is "enthusiastic about forging a revolutionary partnership and dynamic alliance." To read more on this, go to: <http://dailynews.philly.com>

\* **CHOICE:** When Florida began its A+ Education Plan in 1999, students in schools that received failing grades two years in a row were to be given vouchers to attend the public or private school of their choice. Anti-choice critics leapt on the proposal, dragging Florida and poor parents into court in a failed effort to overturn the law. Lost in the shuffle was the question of what effect vouchers would have on public schools. Now we know: Not one public school in Florida earned an "F" grade this year. Forty-one percent of schools earned "A" or "B" grades (up from 21 percent in 1999), while 46 percent of schools got a "C" and only 12 percent earned a "D." Last year's failing schools all moved up to "D."

\* The result mirrors what has happened wherever standards with tests and consequences have been put in place, although the movement in Florida has been more rapid than in most places. The actual results echo a recent report by researcher Jay Greene, who argued that the "threat" of vouchers offered schools a powerful incentive for improvement. For more on the Florida test results, go to: [www.firn.edu/doe/bin00031/releases/010530.htm](http://www.firn.edu/doe/bin00031/releases/010530.htm)

\* **PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS:** What a difference a year (and a contract) makes. Last year, the state of Maryland was so frustrated with achievement at Montebello Elementary School in Baltimore, Maryland, that it contracted with Edison, Inc. to manage the reconstituted school. This year, Montebello's students celebrated the end of school with a trip to an amusement park, having achieved an average 28.6 median percentile gain in reading and 39.8 gain in math for each grade on the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills.

\* **TEACHING:** Educators tired of putting up with the education establishments in their own districts should take a look at the alternatives to be discussed at EDVentures 2001, a conference presented by the Association of Education Practitioners and Providers on July 26-28. To be held at the University of Southern California, topics include "Growing Your Education Business," "Measuring Success," "Forming Strategic Alliances," "Assessing the Education Industry," and more. CER president Jeanne Allen concludes the three-day event with a session on "The War on Charter Schools." For more information, call 1-800-521-3280, or online at [www.aepp.org](http://www.aepp.org).



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