



Making Schools Work Better for all Children

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* **CHARTER SCHOOLS:** The **Pennsylvania** Charter School Appeal Board has finally shown its effectiveness. While last year it turned down the William Bradford Charter School appeal, this year the state appeals board approved three Philadelphia charter school applicants and denied two. Two appeals are pending. Among the approved schools is the state's first conversion school: Lincoln Edison Charter School. Charter schools may go to the board when the local school board denies a charter school proposal. The seven-member board was created to give qualified charter school applicants a more fair and unbiased review opportunity. The written decisions and more information about the Charter School Appeal Board can be obtained by calling the Education Department at 717-783-9802 or visiting: <http://www.pde.psu.edu/charter.html>.

This month, friends of **Oregon** charter schools were greeted by the white flag of submission from their biggest foes as a petition drive to repeal the state's current charter school law was dropped. Proponents of the initiative garnered less than half of the 66,786 signatures required to qualify the proposed change for the November ballot. Although many states consistently strengthen their charter laws through similar methods, no state has ever repealed its charter school law. Today, 36 states and the District of Columbia have charter school laws.

Even though there exists increasing demand in **Virginia** for charter schools, and, while more than 500,000 students in over 2,000 charter schools will be served this fall, Virginia has no charter schools in operation. And only three charter schools are in the starting blocks. Why so few? The state's weak charter school law is the culprit – the statute calls for chartering approval from only local school boards and no appeal of school board rejections. In the words of Frank Riggs, Alexandria resident and former California congressman, "It takes a far-sighted School board member – one willing to defy the education monopoly – to be willing to set up a center of competition within the local school system. Strong-minded reformers should have the help of STRONG STATE LAWS."

***SCHOOL CHOICE:** The temperature is rising during the pre-election period for **Michigan's** November voucher initiative, Proposal 1, due to recent eyebrow raising over campaign practices. Three of the state's school districts were found in violation of election laws because of propaganda urging parents not to support vouchers. Kids First! Yes!, the pro-voucher organization that filed complaints

about the violations, is preparing its fight as the districts are expected to appeal.

* **REFORM IN GENERAL:** Hot off the press is an authoritative history of education in the twentieth century. *Left Back: A Century of Failed School Reforms* by historian Diane Ravitch describe the wars between competing traditions of education, and points the way to reviving American education.

* **TEACHERS:** Recently released test scores prove that over 40 percent of teacher candidates in the state of **Georgia** failed to pass the required tests in order to obtain their teaching licenses. Even before this announcement, Governor Roy Barnes pledged to place Georgia's teachers colleges under heavy scrutiny. This level of awareness is a prime example of the existing questions concerning teacher preparation.

For two decades, **performance-based pay** has ridden both the crests and troughs of passing waves in school reform. Today, the issue is rising again as the idea of competition gains popularity in the field of education. Last week, Colorado's Douglas County Federation of Teachers and the school district negotiated a tentative contract to link student performance, based on teacher evaluations and standardized test scores, to teacher pay. In 1994, Douglas County became the first school district in the nation to implement a merit pay program.



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