



Making Schools Work Better for all Children

Newsire - July 6, 2000

July 6, 2000

Vol. 2, No. 26

*** POLITICS:** Unions Respond to Public's Demand for Better Schools... Not.

At both the NEA and AFT conventions over the last few days, several proposals and comments emerged that demonstrate once again how, despite record spending on public relations, these groups are out of touch with the real problems plaguing school children:

AFT proposes an extra year of high school for poor children: Rather than fix the quality of the current school calendar, AFT president Sandy Feldman argued that high stakes tests require that some children be given an additional year.

Rather than applaud states' efforts to set and measure standards through testing, NEA's president Bob Chase decried the "testing mania" including questions that demand rigorous knowledge about history as seen in Virginia's much supported test.

The NEA recommended again raising union dues to help them combat voucher attempts in the states. They did not recommend lowering the generous salary and benefits package for NEA officials who make in most cases more than three times as much as the classroom teacher.

And the NEA is now on record against pay for performance for teachers which is a must in every other successful industry. (See [WITHOUT MERIT](#), *Wall Street Journal* Editorial, July 10, 2000.)

Both unions endorsed Vice President Al Gore for president, arguing that he represents the progress of the current economy and supports public education. Responded the campaign of Texas Governor George W. Bush: "He need more than unions. He needs the support of parents and a school board members and people in local communities that make decisions that affect our schools." We'd add they both need teachers — who overwhelmingly are not represented by their delegates each year at each convention.

Postscript: CER distributed [Questions to ask the Unions](#) to the press prior to each convention.

See Also: CER Newsire for [July 12](#) and the [July Monthly Letter](#) for additional union conference coverage.

Links: For more on the union's convention activities, see [WITHOUT MERIT](#), *Wall Street Journal* Editorial, July 10, 2000, and search for articles by Anjetta McQueen on

<http://www.nandosearch.com/>.

* **ACHIEVEMENT:** The takeover of Maryland's three worst performing schools began this week, with [Edison Schools, Inc.](#) working to turn around these schools where less than 10% of the children there are achieving at a satisfactory level. Meanwhile, the unions have taken the state to court, as Edison is released from most of the rules of the existing contracts in order to have the maximum flexibility to satisfy the requirements that they succeed in getting children to learn.

Elementary school children in Los Angeles, California made progress as measured by the Stanford 9 standardized tests. Second and third graders improved their spelling the most, although the district's reading scores remained in the bottom third nationally, according to the *LA Times*. However, the modest gains made are being heralded as a good start and the district is undergoing a radical break up into eleven, smaller districts. Proposals are also pending to pay teachers more, based on performance (also being challenged by the union).

* **DOT COMs** may be flaming on Wall Street, but the internet is still changing how we work...and educate. The Western Pennsylvania Cyber Charter School, which is based in Midland, Beaver County, is one of two computer-based education programs in the state and the only one offered to children from kindergarten through grade 12. The other is based in Susquehanna County. Chartered by the Midland School District and administered by Midland superintendent Nick Trombetta, the school is supposed to provide a customized home-schooling program for those students who, for whatever reason, have struggled to fit into the traditional school model. Each student gets a computer and is provided with a choice of several curricula from accredited online programs. Lessons are given online with help available by email or telephone from the school's instructors. So far, parents have been quite excited about the opportunity for a different kind of public education. "We've been called knights in shining armor, godsend and an answer to their prayers," teacher Jane Price told the cyber school board of directors at its last meeting. "It's becoming evident that what we're doing is not just providing an incredible learning experience but also creating an opportunity to do some good works," Trombetta told the AP news wire. "For some of these families, we're a last resort." For more information see www.pde.psu.edu/charter.html.

* **South Carolina** legislators must have some VERY IMPORTANT VACATION PLANS, because they have just walked out on education this legislative session. Recently, a Circuit Court judge ruled that the state's 1996 charter school law is unconstitutional because it includes racial quotas. House lawmakers wanted to remove the restriction, but the Senate preferred loosening the requirement. Neither occurred as the legislature retired for the year without acting on a compromise. What will occur to the existing eight charter schools remains uncertain, but we will keep you up to date.

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