



Making Schools Work Better for all Children

Newsire - August 16, 2000

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Vol. 2, No. 32

***CHARTER SCHOOLS:**

It appears that the devil is indeed in the details. Last week CER reported that after two years of trying to reform the 1993 law, Massachusetts lawmakers lifted the cap on charter schools. Governor Paul Cellucci did, in fact, sign into law the charter school bill last Thursday, August 10th. However, don't be so quick to celebrate – the legislature also introduced new constraints. The effort to lift the cap on the number of charter schools permitted by Massachusetts has been compromised by a union provision that would require collection of authorization cards from only 60% of the employees to put the new school under the district collective bargaining agreement. In other words, there would be no provision for a traditional, more open union election where votes are counted and there is room for public debate on both sides. In addition, most charter schools are permitted to enact bargaining but not as part of the existing contracts. So the staff of a charter that wants to have a union can have their own, specific bargaining provisions that they negotiate rather than having to be part of the district. For more information go to <http://www.pioneerinstitute.org>.

The *Bronx Preparatory Charter School* opens its doors today! After a year and a half of planning, Bronx Prep will be open for business and serve 100 students. During the summer a team of 2 teachers, 30 kids, a principal, a director and support staff opened the school to give those with the greatest need for extra preparation an opportunity to get ready for the school year. All of this activity has taken place under the careful watch of *New York Times* reporter, Jodi Wilgoren. Ms. Wilgoren is writing a series of stories this year on what is involved with the opening of a charter school. Hopefully her perspective on the school's first couple of weeks will be as positive as the effect that Bronx Prep will have on the students. Keep your eyes open for this article!

*** CURRICULUM:** Texas tests have been under much public scrutiny and last month it was reported that on the state's much-heralded TAAS test, 98% of Texas seniors passed all sections. While that's good news, Commissioner Jim Nelson was disappointed to learn that more than half of his students who took first year algebra failed their first year end of course exams. Part of this he attributes to a lack of qualified teachers. Part of this we attribute to a lack of strong math curriculum. It's clear that where real math is taught, children learn algebra. The lessons of Houston's experience over a long period of time with Saxon Math, for example, is enough to suggest that the state may need to alter its standards to be less fuzzy and more demanding of core instruction. If it's not taught, it's likely not learned. For more information, visit <http://www.saxonmath.com/> or <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/press/pr000810.html>.

NY Summer school a bust: NYC Chancellor Harold Levy is disturbed about the low 1 in 3 attendance rate that children had for summer school in the Big Apple. We'd like to offer this solace: If the stakes continue to be raised on children and real standards are used, and if he encourages the proliferation of public-private arrangements with private companies and charter schools, then the real damage these children suffered will be apparent to them when they go back to school. Then again, with fail-safe union contracts that dominate curriculum, process and procedures, it may be hard to make any dent. In that case, Levy may realize it's time for some real business practices and competition to come to New York's schools. We can only hope. For more information go to <http://www.manhattan-institute.org>.

* **BILINGUAL EDUCATION:** The READ INSTITUTE just published an analysis of California test scores on the Stanford 9 after Proposition 227. As you may recall Proposition 227 replaced failed bilingual programs for limited-English-proficient (LEP) students with structured English immersion programs. The study found that LEP students in all grade levels showed improvement and the greatest gains were made in school districts that implemented the most intensive English-immersion programs. Congratulations to students and teachers from the Alameda City Unified School District where LEP students surpassed the national averages – mastering English in one year.



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