



Making Schools Work Better for all Children

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* **CER's SECOND ANNUAL LEADERS FORUM** went off last Monday without a hitch, and for those of you not there, you missed a great event! Exploring and advocating the role of entrepreneurs in education, attendees learned from Aspire Schools CEO, Don Shalvey, how truly innovative school superintendents can use charter schools to break out of the bureaucratic mold and heard from Edison Schools CEO, Chris Whittle, on the growing use of private companies to run public schools. Connie Jones, president of the Core Knowledge Foundation, reported on the growing implementation of the effective Core Knowledge Sequence throughout the country, and Kim Smith, founding president of the New Schools Venture Fund, briefed attendees about her new venture philanthropy fund created by technology venture capitalists and entrepreneurs to improve public K-12 education by investing in education entrepreneurs. For more information on these organizations, visit: www.edisonschools.com or www.coreknowledge.org

Speaking of Edison, that company joined the Miami-based United Teachers of Dade County in a relatively novel approach to charters. The union there has partnered with Edison to create ten new charter schools, a move that some are hailing as historic. Still, caution is needed, as how the Edison approach and the union's contract can co-exist to contribute to a great learning result is not certain. The key agenda for the United Teachers may be less a matter of creating alternatives for kids than preserving the teacher unions' role in public education. Said Annette Katz, of the United Teachers of Dade County: "Charter schools are part of the landscape. If we don't take an active role in deciding what they're going to do, then everything will happen to us ..."

***CHOICE:** Veteran news reporter of Watergate fame Carl Bernstein came about as close as one can get to endorsing vouchers the other night on the Geraldo Rivera show. Bernstein, now Executive VP for Voter.com was discussing how much on the defense the Democrats are with regard to the attachment to the unions. He questioned how, in the face of growing minority support and children stuck in bad schools, the Democrats would be able to defend their position against allowing these children to have an option. The underlying message seemed to be, "This is a plausible idea that the Democrats should have embraced long ago..."

* **STANDARDS:** Virginia's test results are out. And they say that kids can learn when expectations are high. Virginia students posted gains on 21 of 27 state achievement tests, and on 13 of them, at least 70 percent of students achieved a passing score - up from only five exams in 1998. Even in Fairfax County, where opposition to the state tests is centered, the number of schools meeting the criteria for state accreditation (which kicks in in 2007) jumped from 43 last year to 106 this year.

That doesn't seem to stop the pundits from their anti-testing campaign, which is fueling parents to get concerned. Of course, there are people who think school shouldn't be about teaching and learning, or who never met a test they liked. The infamous testing critic Alfie Kohn argues that "many of the leading tests were never intended to measure teaching or learning." One might ask, then, what he presumes they were intended for to judge interpersonal skills?

* **NEW HAMPSHIRE:** The elections are heating up all over the country. In New Hampshire, the phrase "charter schools" seems to drop off the tongues of just about everyone running for office. In that state, charters have had a very hard time getting going because of a cumbersome requirement that forces towns to approve them several times before going forward. The current governor is not pushing any charter reform while all the opposing candidates seem to be trying to quash the status quo.

* **CONGRATULATIONS** to the COMPASS for Lifelong Discovery, an organization providing all manner of educational opportunities to children in the Aspen, Colorado area. COMPASS just celebrated its 30th anniversary providing quality, progressive K-8 education, and most recently entered the charter school arena with the creation of the Aspen and Carbondale, CO Community schools. With a focus on experiential learning and the arts, they may not be everyone's cup of tea but are certainly providing programs of interest and relevance by choice to a large and growing community of parents who are frustrated by the status quo. For information call Lara Whitley, COMPASS' Minister of Propaganda (really!) at (970) 923-4646.

* **DINNER AND A MOVIE:** Don't forget to tune into CHARTER SCHOOLS THAT WORK, a video essay by Pulitzer Prize Winning columnist Clarence Page, to be nationally broadcast on PBS on Friday, September 29, at 10:30 p.m. Invite a neighbor or two over, enjoy a meal, and watch how education is changing for the better throughout America!

* * **THIS JUST IN:** Released this morning is the "Education Freedom Index", identifying how much freedom each state gives their residents when it comes to obtaining the kind of education parents want for their children. Developed by Jay P. Greene and Chester E. Finn Jr., for the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research the study reviews levels of support for public school choice, charter schools, home-schooling and government assisted private school options, and compares them with student achievement in each state. This is hot on the Internet, and you won't want to miss it. Log on to www.manhattan-institute.org.



The Center for Education Reform
910 Seventeenth Street, NW, Suite 1120 • Washington, DC 20006
800-521-2118 • 301-986-8088 • Fax: 301-986-1826

www.edreform.com • cer@edreform.com

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