



Making Schools Work Better for all Children

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NEWS FLASH! The U.S. Supreme Court has agreed to consider the Cleveland school choice program. The rapid pace with which it decided to take the case probably means an early court date, although none has been set.

CER President Jeanne Allen applauded the Court's decision to take the case.

"The Supreme Court's decision to review the constitutionality of school choice is extraordinary," she said. "In a time marked by unbelievable tragedy, this decision provides a ray of hope to thousands for whom education is their only ticket to a happy and productive life."

"We thank God we live in a country where people are granted fair and objective reviews of their civil liberties. By agreeing to review the Ohio school choice case, the nation's High Court is bringing much needed recognition to a legitimate public policy debate, which opponents have for too long tried, in vain, to dismiss as radical or illegitimate.

"Indeed, education in this nation is a right, not a privilege, and most Cleveland, Ohio children have been needlessly forced to attend schools that have been marked by more than two decades of failure.

"In Cleveland, Ohio, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and the state of Florida, some courageous lawmakers have tried to change that. With the Court's consideration of this case and what it represents, we are seeing the unique and unparalleled strength of America and the freedoms on which it stands."

MORE ON SCHOOL CHOICE AND CLEVELAND: According to the Institute for Justice (IJ), "The Court agreed to review the question: 'Does a program designed to rescue economically disadvantaged children from a failing public school system by providing scholarships that they may use in private, religious or suburban public schools that choose to participate in the program -- and which operates in the context of a broad array of public school choices -- violate the First Amendment because in the early stages of the program most of the schools that have agreed to take on scholarship students are religiously affiliated?'"

The case for why the Supreme Court should take this case and why it should find in its favor was made by groups petitioning the court earlier this month. CER's friend of the court (amicus) brief outlines the history of educational failure in Cleveland that caused policymakers there to implement this program. Indeed, as IJ points out in its press release, "in its most recent evaluation, the Cleveland Public Schools

satisfied only three of the state's 27 performance criteria." Click here to read [CER's amicus](#). To review the current state of school choice in America, read [School Choice Today](#), too.

THE SKUNK AT THE GARDEN PARTY: Never content to let anyone think there are people who support the notion that choices help children, the National School Boards Association today released a poll targeted at convincing the public that few support the choice mechanism called vouchers. NSBA asks several misleading questions, similar to the devil's bargain queries used by their brethren at PDK earlier this September. For CER's analysis on the PDK poll, [click here](#).

First, the NSBA pollster asks from among a series of measures which the public supports, and asks respondents to choose from among class size reduction, teacher quality measures, training, new schools or vouchers to improve schools. Respondents are then asked if they'd support measures being considered by Congress and states that use tax dollars to support vouchers. That question yields a 48-48 split. They then ask supporters whether they'd still support vouchers if it meant "a loss of tax dollars." (They don't say to whom or for what.)

Contradicting this line of questions, the pollster asks those polled to agree or disagree with a number of statements. Among them, whether respondents agree that vouchers should be available to any public school student (to which 73% say yes) and another that if vouchers are used, they should be used to pay for all or part of the tuition at private and religious schools (which 83% agree with) and finally whether vouchers should be used to pay for tuition for all children, regardless of family income, with which 54% agree.

(Editor's note: Polls cost lots of money, and at a time when America needs straight talk from its leaders, the largely publicly-funded NSBA may want to stick to its knitting and help school board members where they need it most - making sure their schools work for all children. Then they may not have to worry whether people like vouchers or not.)

QUALITY AND TESTS: Speaking of whether schools work or not, researchers have found that, "There is a chasm of difference in expectations between the National Assessment of Educational Progress and the problems used by world-class mathematics leaders." This conclusion - and extensive analysis - was presented in testimony given yesterday to the National Assessment Governing Board (which oversees NAEP) on the Draft 2004 Math Framework. Comparing NAEP's 8th grade questions with problems used in Singapore (the world leader in math scores), CER witness Dr. John Hoven demonstrated that NAEP's "hard" 8th grade questions are at the level of Singapore's grade 5 - or lower. See [the full testimony](#).

For example, Singapore offers two-step math problems to their third graders; NAEP shows 8th graders a "lunch menu" and asks what the total cost is for random items off the menu. After reviewing dozens of such questions, the conclusion is apparent:

"Singapore's expectation is that all children should acquire mastery of the math skills needed for algebra and beyond. NAEP's expectation is that children need to be able to order take-out from McDonald's."

TEACHERS: Another example of America's quest for freedom comes today from Washington State, where a statewide team of teachers who are fed up with their school employee union is creating an alternative educators' organization. The group that has had a monopoly on teachers, the Washington Education Association, has received the largest-ever fine for campaign finance violations. Thus the Northwest Professional Educators group has been formed and is aimed at focusing on service and professionalism, not politics and self-interest. NWPE president Jeff Leer promised that it "will not spend members' dues on political parties, candidates or non-education political and social issues."



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