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**MONTHLY LETTER TO FRIENDS OF  
THE CENTER FOR EDUCATION REFORM  
NO. 12**

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Dear Friends:

As we reach the end of 1994, we pause to thank those who have been so supportive of us and who have helped make our first fifteen months so successful. This month, we try to make a dent in the never-ending repository of information, and reflect upon opportunities we need to consider for the coming year.



**State-Watch**

We've learned more since the election to provide an even deeper view into what is possible in the coming months for education reformers:

- For example, newly elected California legislators plan to tackle the charter school law there and broaden its scope, along with taking on unfunded mandates thrown down from both state and federal governments. In addition, there is some Democratic and much Republican support for breaking up the Los Angeles Unified School District.
- Illinois now has education reformers in prominent leadership roles. Senate Majority leader James "Pate" Phillips is a champion of charter schools and has been supportive of pilot private school choice programs. There is also talk of breaking up Chicago's school system.
- Idaho legislators plan to start building support for school choice legislation, which the state's newly elected superintendent of schools, Anne Fox, supports.
- North Carolina's double majority may have a hey day with efforts aimed at curbing bureaucratic oversights, state largesse and other efforts that hamper local control.
- Legislators in Washington State are gung-ho about putting on the table as many reform bills as possible, until they exhaust that state's unfriendly Governor and Superintendent.



- North Dakota folks are also positioning themselves for some choice legislation, with the help of a growing number of dedicated supporters.
- In those places we return "to fight another day," Connecticut has begun to move forward, with Governor-elect John Rowland reportedly having given his support to last year's choice and charter bill. And the Wall Street Journal's John Fund reports that Pennsylvania Governor-elect Tom Ridge wants to be the first to put his reform measures forward.

All in all, we think there will be lots of surprises in store. One thing is certain, the states are now filled with more real citizen legislators willing to try just about anything to put a crack in the education system shell

### **Inside the Beltway**

- While most of us stay focused on our states, it is important to keep an eye outward, where talk about getting Washington off our backs applies no less to education.

Among the things being considered: Comprehensive block grants of categorical programs, voucherizing chapter 1 and bilingual education, repealing the red meat in Goals 2000 and pulling out mandates from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) which required states to submit standards in order to receive Chapter 1 funding, among other things. Empower America is leading the charge with legislative proposals; Heritage has a lengthy prescription as well as to what should be done, and the pro-family groups have been meeting to hammer out their agenda.

- Meanwhile, Education Secretary Riley does not appear to fully understand the difference between a strong national and an encroaching federal role. In a letter responding to the Empower America plans, Riley says "If ever there was a time that education should remain a national priority it is now in the 1990s. This is no time to de-emphasize education as [Msrs. Alexander and Bennett] have suggested..Former U.S. Secretary of Education Terrel Bell was encouraged to eliminate the department, but fortunately he had the good sense to raise the alarm that our nation was at risk."

The truth is that one can very easily be a national leader without requiring that states and locales do everything the federal government demands.

- We are only cautiously optimistic about possibilities in the newly formulated House Economic and Educational Opportunities Committee. The chairman, Pennsylvania Representative Bill Goodling, for example, is inclined toward relinquishing some mandates, but is not so inclined toward

other fundamental reforms. And then there's Rep. Steve Gunderson, who believes anyone who wants to return power to the states is against standards. Gunderson acknowledged to Education Week that "right wing Republicans may force votes to strike national standards provisions" from Goals 2000, and urged business people to organize to get the national standards retained.

So while there are indeed opportunities, it will be an uphill struggle. The more the states voice their demands, via the governors, the legislators, and the think tanks, the more likely reform. The states have been strong in asserting their rightful ownership of issues like welfare. State officials should be no less passionate in their pleas for education relief.

*A side note:* We've recently forewarned several federal and state legislators that deregulation efforts require additional oversight and penalties to deter errant bureaucrats from continuing to weave their own interpretations of law into regulations. Relief bills are just as susceptible.

(You can help us educate Washington: The Center has been asked to help provide examples of obstacles to reform, success stories from around the country, and real people who are demanding they be empowered. If you know of others to bring here -- friendly teachers, school board members and the like with whom we may not know -- please let us know.)

### **Timely Research**

A couple of reports are out that are important for school reform:

On Bilingual Education: A report from New York City found that bilingual education was not entirely effective there, and that limited-English speaking children who spent most of their time in English-speaking classes did much better than their counterparts in bilingual classes.

The exorbitant cost of bilingual education in the Big Apple is truly shocking. It is more than \$2,000, on average, over the cost of educating non-bilingual education students. The report is said to be inconclusive, but it nevertheless reiterates long-standing critiques of bilingual education. Incidentally, the federal government is spending about \$10 billion on this stuff, not to mention the sheer cost to states of the mandates.

The California legislature actually released schools from bilingual education requirements, providing them instead with flexibility in teaching limited-English students. Yet the State Department of Education wrote regulations re-mandating certain requirements. Thus virtually no flexibility is being exercised in this program (except in charter schools). The bureaucrats reign supreme.



On Charter Schools: Michigan charter schools have almost twice as many minority students and higher proportions of low-income students, than their public school counterparts serving the same areas, says a study released by the Michigan Center for Charter Schools. Michigan's findings are very similar to results in California, Colorado and Massachusetts' approved charters. Interestingly, the study also predicts that 1,000 charter schools will be operating in Michigan by 2005. Call (517) 394-5011 for more information.

### **Education Updates....**

.....**Speaking of Michigan, since the court declared the schools invalid, it** looked as if the schools would have to close. Last week, the legislature met to rework the law so as to make charters permissible under the state's constitution. As it stands, the Senate has approved two bills: one to provide stop-gap funding to the eight approved public school academies, and one that brings the charter law into compliance with the court's ruling. It is problematic whether or not this type of fix will allow the schools to remain independent.

.....**Puerto Rico is not as bright. As reported by the Institute for Justice, the** Supreme Court there struck down the private school aspects of the school choice program. Puerto Rico's constitution "forbids financial 'support' of private schools." And the court itself is intensely political, comprised mainly of individuals from the opposition party. The good news is that there are no implications in this decision for other states, and that at least a majority of the 17,000 children who chose an alternative public school will be able to exercise that kind of choice for years to come.

.....**On the bright side, Milwaukee continues to provide a stunning example** of a place, a coalition, a group of people that are on the right track. With the goal of expanding the choice program there city-wide, including religious schools among the choices available, a coalition of the city's largest employers, the Mayor, and an extremely diverse group of parents are well on their way to reaching their goal. To top it all off, Republicans chose Democratic State Rep. Polly Williams to chair the Urban Education Committee. Now the challenge is for Governor Tommy Thompson to include the choice program's expansion in his budget for a fast, easy and virtually assured way of passage. If he doesn't, the proposal will still be brought up and possibly passed in the legislature. With the new, bold speaker, David Prosser and Polly teaming up, it should be a done deal. But it sure would be nice if the Governor would save us some of the political volley and bring the issue to closure in January.



## Reflections

Last month I visited the Jingtowen Charter School, in a Hispanic barrio in Oakland, CA., and Fellowship Academy, a private religious school--predominantly minority -- in inner city San Francisco. They were vastly different from many of the schools I've seen. I was overwhelmed by the kind of learning going on in both; the quality of the lessons, the atmosphere -- what you'd expect from the finest in private schools was present in these schools. I walked away with a renewed commitment, and a renewed understanding of what this reform movement is all about.

We don't always have the time to visit and observe schools, but my challenge to all of you is to make time -- on every trip you take out of your area -- to visit any number of interesting schools. If you haven't seen those that exist right in your own backyard, take time to go see them now. When you travel, carve out some time for a visit. Your batteries will be recharged -- whether because you saw so much good happening, or because you saw what was lacking. If you need ideas, we'd be more than happy to help you find an interesting school wherever you go.

Don't underestimate what your visit can do for the people at such a school. It is rewarding when people take notice and help to showcase their work. It makes their job all that much easier as they face challenges, as they grapple with how to make things work, and how to make ends meet.

## A New Year's Resolution?

Finally, let me offer a proposal: we've all heard more than our share about adopt-a-school partnerships. What about reinventing the adopt-a-school concept, only this time, bringing reformers and reform groups together with reformed schools? Adopting a charter, a private school, a school involved in a choice program could include occasional consultation, advice or encouragement, and every-so-often a modest donation of a book, magazine or even a care package of supplies. A network of "adopted charters" for example, or "adopted schools of choice" would bolster our ever increasing network of people and institutions doing good things. And we'd be making a big difference to someone for a very small commitment.

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So much to do, so little time...

You have our warmest wishes for a healthy, happy, holiday season. May God's richest blessings provide you with a prosperous New Year!

*Jeanne*  
Jeanne Allen



