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**MONTHLY LETTER TO FRIENDS OF  
THE CENTER FOR EDUCATION REFORM  
NO. 16**

**MAY, 1995**

Dear Friends:

Spring has sprung in state legislatures, with tremendous activity on reform efforts. Many of you are personally involved in these efforts, and if we can be of assistance with educational material for your legislators, experts to testify, or strategic input, don't hesitate to call. And please keep us updated so we can pass on the good news and lessons learned to others in the trenches.



**The Truth, The Whole Truth and Nothing But....**

- The Nation's Report Card. The nation received its reading report card last week with the release of The National Assessment of Educational Progress. But scant attention was paid in the media to the results revealing the tragically low reading abilities of this nation's 4th, 8th and 12th graders. (If we wanted to be skeptical of Education Secretary Riley, we might note that this was the first time the NAEP results were not announced by an education secretary, even though just two months ago, Secretary Riley announced great progress was being made!)

What NAEP tells us: A significant decline in average reading proficiency occurred among 12th grade students from 1992-94. All subgroups — White, Hispanic, Black, male and female— suffered a decline, with Hispanics slipping at the most alarming rate. In all, only 34% of 12th graders are proficient in reading. More specifically, 12th graders in the Northeast, Central and West "displayed lower average reading proficiency than their counterparts in 1992."

Fourth graders, who are entering an especially pivotal stage in their development, also have declined in reading; almost half of all 4th graders and 31% of 8th graders cannot read at even a basic level. Where does your state fall? (Interestingly, D.C. was the only group that chose not to release its results. Our imaginations run wild.)

- North Dakota, Wisconsin, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Iowa, and Connecticut had the highest average fourth grade proficiency, although they still experienced a decline or showed no progress.



- Delaware, Louisiana, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Utah and Virginia showed significant declines between '92 and '94.

While these most recent NAEP results confirm the public's worst suspicions, Gerald Bracey et al will no longer be able to cite dubious and well-worn excuses about why too many schools are failing too many kids. Finally, the National Center for Education Statistics has eliminated factors often used to explain away low test scores. *Neither changes in test format nor a higher number of minority test takers were factors in this decline.* A copy of *1994 NAEP Reading: At First Look* is available from the National Library of Education at (800) 424-1616.

- Public School Teachers and the Private Schools. From leading education authority (and CER Board member) Denis Doyle comes an eye opening report on where the public — and its school teachers — send their children for schooling. Using 1990 Census data provided through the U.S. Department of Education, Doyle's findings show that in most major urban cities, public school teachers *are more than twice as likely* to send their children to private schools as other Americans. Teachers from households with combined incomes of over \$70,000 are even more likely to use private schools. Some dramatic examples of the private school enrollment of public school teachers:

|                    |                     |                  |                      |
|--------------------|---------------------|------------------|----------------------|
| Pittsburgh, 35.4%  | New York, 27.9%     | Newark, 37.8%    | Philadelphia, 35.9%  |
| Chicago, 36.3%     | Grand Rapids, 41.1% | Dayton, 29.8%    | Baltimore, 31.7%     |
| Jersey City, 50.3% | Cleveland, 39.7%    | Boston, 44.6%    | Los Angeles, 30.1%   |
| Toledo, 35.8%      | Detroit, 32.7%      | Milwaukee, 32.9% | San Francisco, 36.7% |

Denis' report will be out in the next few weeks. If you'd like a copy of "Where Connoisseurs Send Their Children to School: An Analysis of 1990 Census Data to Determine Where School Teachers Send Their Children to School," (April 1995), please let us know and we'll pass the information on to Denis.

### **From The States** *A roundup of current happenings*

- Late Saturday, May 6, the Texas House of Representatives passed an omnibus education bill that provided for charter schools and home rule districts. The charter school provision is not restrictive as to who may start a school and provides for an appeals process via the State Board of Education. However, a bipartisan-sponsored amendment that would have created pilot voucher programs was defeated 83-63. Debate on the floor was one-sidedly against the measure, and in the end about a dozen legislators, who earlier had declared their support, waffled on the vote. Sadly, in the final weeks leading up to the vote, it was not unusual to hear legislators voice personal support for the pilot concept but admit that they were going to let political expedience guide their vote. The entire bill now goes before committee to be reconciled with the Senate education bill, which did include a pilot choice program.



But unless political pressure is brought to bear, it is unlikely a voucher component will be included in the final bill.

- **New Hampshire** is moving along in its consideration of a charter school bill, even though the House Education Committee Chairman and some of the members were a little squeamish at hearings last month over the possibility that charters would remove rather than reinforce local control. A host of experts testified to the contrary, and progress is reportedly being made toward getting the House to adopt legislation that would at least create a 10-charter per year pilot project. The Senate-passed version was unlimited in scope.

- Although **Arizona** has joined the list of reform states with an expansive charter law and the revamping of its state's assessment system, school choice proponents were disappointed that none of their proposals were adopted this session. As an April 26 *Education Week* analysis explains however, it was not the opposition that led to defeat, but rather the fact that so many different school choice proposals were introduced, splintering support for any one proposal.

- **Pennsylvania** joined the growing list of states taking on the reform of their whole public school system. Governor Tom Ridge unveiled his proposal at Steelton Highspire Elementary School on May 9. He told the Pennsylvania State Education Association earlier that week that "no one — no government — no organization — ought to have veto power over what a parent thinks is best for their children." Ridge's school choice plan earmarks \$38.5 million for over 50,000 children who are not benefiting from their existing public school. Ridge's plan would also include \$1 million in planning grants for school districts to design charter schools and a comprehensive state report card.

- Next door in **Ohio**, Cleveland City Councilwoman Fannie Lewis' efforts paid off last month when the House there voted to allow her city's residents the opportunity to choose among all schools. The Cleveland choice plan would require that at least half of the students receiving their scholarships be from the public schools, and is limited to grades K-3. Interested, qualifying children would apply via lottery, and schools could not charge more than 10% above the scholarship amount, which is \$2500. On March 3, Cleveland was taken over by the state under judge's orders. The city is facing a \$2 million shortfall, and plans are underway to close 14 schools.

- By the third week in May, **Illinois** legislators will vote on a reform bill to create statewide charter schools — albeit with several restrictions — and to provide 2000 scholarships of up to \$2500 for one of Chicago's elementary school sub-districts. The bill, supported by a coalition including Chicago Democrats, is waiting for the House Executive Committee's action. If they have any doubt about the effectiveness of alternatives to the Chicago public schools, they should visit one of two Westside Preparatory Academies, formed by the renowned Marva Collins, who tirelessly continues to provide one of the best educations in the world for inner-city



minorities. Mrs. Collins' third school is located in Cleveland, where Cleaster Mims is educating approximately 160 students in the same fashion. Mrs. Collins' 6 year-olds are doing fourth grade work. So much for the theory that society's problems are an insurmountable obstacle for kids.

- Newark, New Jersey just joined Paterson and Jersey City as a ward of the state, for failing to provide an adequate education. The Newark district has been rife with spending irregularities. Judge Stephen Weiss approved the state's takeover and condemned the district for bringing less than 10% of 8th graders and only 25% of 11th graders to a proficient level in the basics. Senate Education Committee Chairman Jack Ewing cited Newark's failures when he presided over a regional charter school hearing there on April 29, and said that charters would be a step in the right direction to helping children everywhere obtain a good education.
- The word from Michigan is that at least 50 new charter schools will be approved by this fall under its two-year old law. The statute endows both universities and school districts with chartering authority. A majority of the 39 schools sponsored by Central Michigan University alone will be up and running this coming school year. Among the CMU schools is an inner-city Detroit charter run by some of the city's African-American leaders using the Edison Project's challenging curriculum. Earlier this year, Michigan voters overwhelmingly told the *Detroit Free Press* that the city's schools are not challenging enough. More than half of those living in major, urban areas expressed their support for school choice.
- Finally, the Florida legislature is completing its school reform action with a charter school bill that would allow teachers, non-profit groups or parents to start schools. And, in Connecticut legislation is pending that would enable school districts to decide for themselves whether or not they would like to put in place a program to assist low-income children in attending schools of choice. The only requirements from the state are that the voucher, which would be roughly half of per pupil expenditures (\$4,000 in the case of Hartford, for example), would have to be accepted as full tuition by the participating school and spaces would be filled by lottery. The rest of the money would stay in the local public schools for at least one year. The 'Yankee' state's scores on the Connecticut mastery test recently showed that barely half of all students tested in the 4th, 6th and 8th grade met the goal for reading and math, and less than half met the goal for writing.

It is likely that by the time we correspond again, there will have been some major breakthroughs in the states. We'll let you know of any developments by fax, and more later when we write in June. If you are not on our fax alert list and would like to be, please let us know.



## A Word to the Wise

"Schools are used as ideological battlegrounds. We cannot fix families, but we should focus on what we can do well — academics. For some kids it's the only way to escape."

1995 Superintendent of the Year Robert R. Spillane, Fairfax County, Virginia

"The schools that don't work, for instance, have guaranteed revenues, guaranteed customers, and the shots are all being called in the central office bureaucracy. That's why some of the more promising school reforms involve giving parents a choice of public schools or letting groups of teachers set up new 'charter schools.' These reforms instill a sense of competition, while preserving our historic commitment to public education."

President Bill Clinton, April 10, 1995, *Newsweek*

*(Note: We learned of this quote from a "discomforted" union leader, who wrote that she thought "This statement was very badly worded, but very close to not OK. Leave out the words 'public' and 'teachers' and it is very bad.")*

"The bottom line is jobs... they want their paychecks raised, they want their benefits, they want, they want, they want. See, I'm a taxpayer and I'm an employee, so I'm between the Devil and the deep blue sea. But if I go to the store and I want a loaf of bread, I can buy Italian bread or German bread or white bread, whatever kind of bread I want. Here, I don't want to say it's just the union, but there's no selection. You've got what's here, and most people don't think that's good enough."

Mrs. Cusaac, Turner School Library Aide, Wilkinsburg, PA

## A View from the Blob

The NEA is challenging the efforts of local school boards whenever they attempt to contract with private firms, for just about anything. Many districts contract with food service companies like ARA and Marriott, for instance, and local and state affiliates are targeting these companies and more.

A Texas Education Association member brags that after two years they finally "convinced the board to cancel the contract" with ARA for food and maintenance services in LaPorte Independent School District. In Lubbock, Texas, local union officials are delighted that Marriott's employees were unionized after "hard-nosed bargaining by the union leaders." The New Jersey Education Association boasts that the local Trenton association head was able to cancel an exploratory phase for bringing in the Edison Project by talking about Edison's financial status. In Pinckney, Michigan, union activists have targeted school board reformers who dared to consider contracting some services to Educational Alternatives, Inc. Two of the reformers are up for reelection, and the unions are creating a firestorm of attacks. NEA leaders boast: "The Pinckney Education Association helped defeat EAI



through intensive corporate research, community education and political action — sending two anti-EAI community people to the school board last June." Says one union member, in the "election coming up and they will lose their majority. Yeah."

The NEA provides strategic advice in their booklet called "Contracting Out: Strategies for Fighting Back." They call it the "definitive resource on privatization." The AFT has developed a guide to the common characteristics of districts that are apt to (oh, no!) contract out with EAI, Edison or even Sylvan Learning Systems. Among the conditions that might lead to such actions, the AFT warns members to watch for: local media criticism of the schools or their services; administrators conducting performance audits; a district task force being convened; a proposed reorganization of your school or agency; and schools faced with a budget crisis. Funny, sounds like conditions in all too many districts!

### **Speaking of Contracting...**

The fact is that many school districts already contract with private firms for services, believing that efficiency in administrative functions is an important goal. The *American School Board Journal* (3/95) has an enlightening piece by past and present Hartford, CT school board members Kathy Evans and Ted Carroll, entitled "Why We Did It," about their move to have EAI join them in operating the city's troubled schools. Hartford leaders view the partnership in this way:

Although some have described our action as desperate, we feel it's just plain smart and likely to be emulated by other school districts across the country committed to improving how public schools are run.

Probably the greatest contribution EAI will bring to Hartford ... is a sense of accountability. Our school district, and most other school districts, hold neither students nor employees to high performance standards. It *must* happen for both groups, but it begins with management—the school board, superintendent, and private management—being held to high performance expectations, too.

### **...And Some More Good Reasons For?**

The May 3rd edition of *PrimeTime Live!* aired a riveting story about school bureaucracy and waste. Teachers interviewed from coast to coast complained bitterly about the endless administrative burdens placed on them, from having to get six approvals for buying textbooks, to wading through a bureaucratic maze just to punish unruly students. The must-see piece also shows chilling coverage of how custodians operate in New York, as well as hidden camera footage of a principalship being purchased for \$2000 in cash. You can obtain a copy by calling 1-800-913-3434.



## On Standards and Accountability

- Minnesota has unveiled new high school standards that require students to pass tests in each of the core subject areas. These tests are said to be challenging, and despite some debate over how to finance them, the public is clamoring for a roll-out.
- That is not the case in Virginia, where the Governor's Commission on Champion Schools unveiled its new set of standards for English, Math, Science and Social Studies. The challenging requirements are under attack from some groups charging that they ask too much of students. Example: Second graders would be expected to describe the discovery of the New World, identify individuals and groups important to the formation of new governments and religions, use topographical maps, and identify political offices and office holders in their area and in the U.S. Second graders would also be asked to explain the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, and later, how the search for goods led to the discovery of the New World.

While these are definitely challenging assignments for the average 8 year old, is it correct to call them "developmentally inappropriate?" We'd like to hear from you if you have a comment on just this glimpse of the Virginia Standards. Tell us what you think is appropriate or share your local curricula with us.

- Michigan's State Board of Education is wrestling over a state mandate to develop a core curriculum versus the board's desire to let local districts come up with their own standards. Apparently, the question is not whether there should be standards, but whether the state has any role or can have any positive effect in determining them. Stay tuned.
- Looking for up-to-date, unbiased statistics on schools in your state? Chances are The National School Reporting Service, Inc. will have the answers. Presently a service provided to real estate agents and their clients, *The School Report* contains over 200 pieces of information including: district size, curriculum details, extracurricular programs, SAT scores, awards, personnel directories and more. For information call 1-301-924-1360 and ask for Steve Wetzler, an independent distributor of the report.

## Late Breaking News

- The NEA's best efforts have not stopped innovation from coming to Wilkinsburg, PA. On Friday, May 6, a Pennsylvania Commonwealth Court judge lifted an injunction which had halted the school board in its plans to hire Alternative Public Schools, Inc. to manage one school. Apparently, the union's effort "lacked a sufficient factual basis."

• Milwaukee Superintendent Howard Fuller handed in his resignation after four successful years. It wasn't because of his support from the business or African-American communities, nor was it due to his support from the city's Democratic mayor or the state's Republican Governor. And, it definitely wasn't the satisfaction of the general public that did him and his reforms in. Only one group deserves credit for his departure — the Milwaukee Teachers Education Association. Contrast Fuller's obvious disappointment with the MTEA's school board agenda:

Fuller: I [would] be maneuvered into a position where I would be expected to become a bureaucrat protecting the status quo, while the public is led to believe that true reform is underway. Too often in the last several years, our children have suffered under the yoke of these powerful forces.

MTEA: We, the MTEA members, must work very hard to elect pro-public education, *pro-employee* candidates.



We're grateful for your continued calls and letters. Next month, look for a profile on what's happening in the schools in the nation's capitol, an update on the outcome of school board races in several states, a look at conferences coming up and, of course, a report on the many state initiatives underway.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jeanne".

Jeanne Allen  
President

The Center for Education Reform is a national, non-profit education advocacy group and an active broker in providing help, support and guidance to hundreds of communities and most of these United States.

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