

THE CENTER FOR EDUCATION REFORM  
MONTHLY LETTER TO FRIENDS  
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Dear Friends:

As promised last we met, we're bringing you final results in this year's legislative battles to save our children. You'll find as well some rantings on the BLOB, Scene 1, Act 4; notes on reforms helping children, and some that may be a bit misguided. We also remind you of our August break from publishing. We'll not see you 'til September, (sans the CD-ROM version of the song!, unfortunately.)



**In the States**

- The juries have reached verdicts in states where charter legislation was under consideration. *Minnesota* improved its law the most: the cap is lifted, university sponsorship is permitted, and lease-aid supplied...*Nevada* passed a law, sort-of, to permit 21 schools, with very little autonomy...*New Hampshire* and *Connecticut* both made minor adjustments to their law, removing geographic limits on charters in the former, and allowing more children to attend charters in the latter...*Ohio* now has a modest program in Lucas County...*Wisconsin* passed significant amendments but they are now tied up in a law suit, *AND*....

- *Pennsylvania's* only 8-week old charter law has spawned its first charter school. The Keystone Education Center Charter School was approved by the Reynolds and Greenville school districts, and will serve 100 at-risk students in grades 6-12. Reform-minded Secretary of Education, Eugene Hickok, says that as many as 10 charters may open next year, 50 the next, and 100 the year after. The nation's 29th charter law puts no cap on the number of charters, and while only local boards can approve, an appeals-process will kick-in in '99. For Pennsylvanians considering starting a charter school, Drexel University is holding a technical assistance conference on August 26 & 27. Call (609) 727-8000 for more information.

- Colorado Governor Roy Romer, dealt a harmful blow to his charter friends in the Centennial state when he vetoed a bill to increase the share of funding that charter schools now receive from 80 to 95 percent. Local sources say there's a fox in the hen-house, and Romer saw no reason to put charters on equal footing. Isn't there a phrase about loyalty equaling friendship, and less than that is just courtship?

- Anyone wanting to help make the *Nation's Capital* a better place to live and a model for the country should come on over and put in their application for a charter school. The Congressionally-mandated DC Charter School Board has released its application, and rumor has it that there are dozens of interested parties mulling around to take advantage of this relatively strong law. Besides, we reformers get awful lonely around here. We'd welcome some company!
- *Overall*, charters were not enacted in five states that made a strong go-of-it, positive changes were made in four, and new laws were enacted in four. Not bad for a movement where the opponents are neither down nor out...yet.
- The *Land of 10,000 Lakes* can now be considered the land of nearly as many choices, thanks to enactment in June of MN Governor Arne Carlson's education package. Besides dramatic charter improvements, families of varying income levels can now earn tax credits or take deductions for certain private school expenses, which is particularly noteworthy for poor families, whose struggle to send children to safe, quality schools will now be met with a commitment to help with transportation costs, fees, and tutoring needs. The unions are still reeling from this blinding defeat. Despite intense union lobbying of DFL lawmakers to reject the entire package, these reps apparently welcomed the opportunity to part company with the unions that Carlson has described as controlling the DFL majority. Carlson advisor Tim Sullivan, who spearheaded the effort, said the Gov "wanted choice and more education options for every single parent and that's exactly what he got."

### **The AFT, Ohio School Choice and Spilled Milk**

The fact that a lawsuit in Ohio has rendered Cleveland's school choice scholarship program inoperable, pending further appeal, did not dissuade Governor George Voinovich and the Ohio legislature from extending the program for two more years, and doubling the number of eligible children. Attorneys for the state are expecting a decision on whether the courts will lift the injunction for 97-98 while the appeal is considered. In the meantime, a report issued on June 24 by independent evaluators, Harvard's Paul Peterson, and University of Houston's Jay Greene, attests to preliminary success of the program. Cleveland's HOPE Academies, founded by David Brennan, an Ohio business leader, posted impressive achievement gains on the Cal. Achievement Test. "After one year, students in Kindergarten through third grade scored, on average, 5.4 percentile points higher on reading tests, and 15.0 percentile points higher on the math concepts test."

Rather than cheer them on, the AFT's "research" office kept from biting their nails this year by pulling together a "report" that says the program has had little effect but to subsidize kids already in private school, which make up about 25% of the past year's scholarship recipients. Following the same logic, perhaps when the President's new higher education scholarship is implemented, AFT will say kids already in college, albeit possibly struggling, shouldn't haven't a crack at the money.

The most significant aspect of the Cleveland choice program, twisted as a negative by the AFT, is that 42% of scholarship recipients were kindergartners. AFT

says these parents were only seeking full-day kindergarten, and not necessarily “fleeing the public schools.” The more objective view is that given the choice, parents of first time students wouldn’t dream of enrolling their children in schools that are so troubled they’ve just been turned over to the Mayor.

There’s a children’s story book you may know, about cloud formations that look like lots of things, including spilled milk. Its last stanza says, “*only it wasn’t spilled milk; It’s just a cloud in the sky.*” Oh, if only that were true in this case!

## **The NEA, New Unionism, and PR**

The amazing-technicolor union is revamping its image — again — in response to an internal review it commissioned which recommended the NEA take on an agenda for the 21st century that shows its real concern for accountability (See Monthly Letter #36) Rather than recommend abolition of much-maligned tenure laws, the NEA recommends members participate in peer review and evaluation. NEA prez Bob Chase says “*We must seek a voice, more control over the continuum of teaching...teacher evaluation and review are very much part of that continuum.*” As reported by Mike Antonucci of the Education Intelligence Agency, a new group that examines union trends, “there is less than meets the eye,” in this plan. “The decision (to evaluate) is left up to local associations, the primary purpose is to provide ‘assistance’ to teachers, the program must be developed through collective bargaining, the examining teachers must be approved by the examined teacher, examiners must be ‘diverse,’ rigorous and extensive assistance must be provided before the teacher is counseled out of the profession, and ‘due process’ still must be strictly adhered to.” So, despite all of these so-called efforts to ensure excellence, the districts still must pursue expensive and timely legal efforts to make simple employment decisions.

*Speaking of tenure:* With union pressure, *New Hampshire’s* Governor **vetoed** a comprehensive reform bill that included abolishing de-facto teacher tenure and instead empowered local school boards to fire teachers who do not meet locally-set education standards. It would have also prohibited collective bargaining on matters related to tenure, and put in a statutory protection of the board’s powers, allowing them to set 3-year renewal contracts for teachers. The package, shepherded by Senator Jim Rubens, also would have required public school teachers to take basic skills competency tests at intervals of certification and recertification, and for a high school graduation test. The state’s union, an NEA affiliate, called it teacher bashing.

## **Mea Culpa**

Under the heading of we can’t please all of the people all of the time, a National Assoc. of State Boards of Education (NASBE) official wrote last month to tell us we erred in suggesting that a NASBE past-president was their representative on the Administration’s National Testing panel. Technically, she’s right, but the fact is that the whole plan has been predictably co-opted. Chester E. Finn, Jr., an author, researcher, and former Education Dept. official, initially cheered on the concept of the National Test, yet warned from the beginning that its authority had to be placed in an independent body, such as the National Assessment Governing Board, which oversees

NAEP. Lamenting the “progress” made in developing National Tests in the July 21 *Weekly Standard*, Finn notes that not only is the main contract for oversight with the [CCSSO], “the establishment’s most change-averse crew,” but also that “a huge consortium of private test-makers and publishers is positioned to get the job — a price tag rumored to be near \$50 million.”

“For a new federal project, it’s moving extraordinarily fast, apparently so that binding commitments can be made during the current fiscal year before Congress cranks up to do anything...In truth it’s moving far too quickly for something as momentous as national tests in a country that never had anything of the sort before...What’s most alarming is that these tests will be **creatures of the education establishment** and prone to its postmodern curricular faddishness...First, the contractor is in charge of its own advisory committees. Second, the committees are narrowly based...and third, and most worrisome, the two subject-matter committees, for reading and math, include only educators and experts... People I respect in math and reading who have eyeballed these lists use words like “disaster” to describe the tests and standards that they expect to emerge.”

As an aside, the very-respected NYU professor and scholar of history, Diane Ravitch, just resigned from her post on the one of the panels.

### From the Trenches

- “Taurean Gissendanner, 7, and Devon Love, 6 could not control themselves when the tall white man wearing a casual sports shirt and charcoal slacks entered the cafetorium (*sic*). They left their breakfast trays on the table and ran to him. Taurean shouted, ‘Hey, Mr. Jeb Bush!’ He leaped into Bush’s arms and displayed a fish he had drawn. Bush praised the child.” Thus begins a *May St. Petersburg, FL Times* article about an extraordinary place of learning, **The Liberty City Charter School** in Miami, the result of a unique partnership between Bush and Urban League chief T. Willard Fair. Florida’s first charter school boasts a tough curriculum using the Core Knowledge Program, a strong underpinning in civic and character education, and a low-tolerance for disruptive behavior. “Our kids came to us pushing, shoving, fighting, cussing and kicking, no respect for property and cleanliness,” says Katrina Wilson-Davis, Liberty’s principal. Because of our approach, “if you walk around this building, you don’t see crayon marks on the walls, desks written on and general destruction.” In fact, while it’s still early, all indications point to better educational attainment. Would that all children could get a Liberty City-education.

- **Shake, Rattle & Roll...**Chicago’s Mayor Richard Daley is pretty happy these days over the work of his CEO for schools’ Paul Vallas in *shaking* up failing schools, *rattling* old work rules, and *rolling* a few heads in the process. Sixteen principals have been dismissed, disruptive students routed to other classes, and seven failing schools have been targeted for full reconstitution, which, if approved by the Chicago Board of Trustees, requires the resignation of all staff and reapplication. The student council president, Tiana Reed, told reporters she thinks it’s a good idea, and thinks as many as 40 percent of teachers there should be changed. “Some of them just don’t care. They don’t try hard enough for the students.” And proving Tiana’s underlying concern that

students are not challenged enough, after sufficient warning to 25 percent of Chicago eighth graders that they may have to repeat classes before entering high school if they didn't improve, elementary reading and math scores shot up 14% and 20% respectively in two years, and high school scores are up, although still below the 30% above-national norm high of seven years ago.

- Another troubled urban district, **Baltimore, MD**, has followed suit in having non-educators take responsibility for reform. Conspicuously absent from Baltimore's new Governor- and Mayorial-appointed Board of School Commissioners are active members of the BLOB. Rather, they appointed a diverse group of university and business leaders. Said Mayor Kurt Schmoke, "I do not want any of them to come on board thinking they represent a limited constituency." The new law governing the management changes requires a serious reorganization for improvement, in exchange for an infusion of new money into the district. By October's end, the Commissioners must appoint a chief executive officer, a decision that could make or break their efforts. Some advice for the Board? Check out the Barclay School's achievement gains from instituting a very rigorous, core curriculum, while fighting bureaucratic opposition. Therein lie insights into what makes children learn, and what stands in the way of others trying to do the same.

- "I am a student at **Skills for Tomorrow Charter High School** (MN). I'm taking some college courses and I have noticed that my professors and the other students are very interested in charter schools. I feel that charter schools are effective in giving students a useful education. Every time I give a presentation I always talk about how good charter schools are. I hope that the legislators recognize that these schools are making a big change and need to be recognized for what they are doing for us. To *all* supporters of charter schools, I say thank you! R." CER E-Mail 6/10/97

- **Choice in Chittendon**..Residents of this Vermont hamlet are free to send their high schoolers to any private, non-sectarian school of choice, but not permitted to be "tuitioned out" to a parochial school, said a Rutland Superior Court Judge on June 27. The Chittendon School Board had voted last May to pay for 15 local children whose parents had chosen Mount St. Joseph's in Rutland. Nearly 100 Chittendon students, with no resident high school, go to other towns to attend both public and private schools with their dollars in tow. The Judge recognized, but disagreed with, the 1994 Vermont Supreme Court's *Campbell* decision that "allowed a Manchester parent to be reimbursed for tuition he paid for his child to attend a religiously affiliated school outside of Vermont", according to the *Rutland Herald*. He used as precedent an older, 1961 ruling that a town's payment of tuition to a parochial school violates the church-state issues. Still, Libby Sternberg, president of Vermonters for Educational Choice is hopeful. An appeal has been filed to the Vermont Supreme Court, and the case may eventually reach the high court.

- The Munster, Indiana *Times* gave light to an idea worthy of exploration. Morton Marcus of Indiana University recommended we *Put welfare mothers to work helping our teachers*. "**If we train welfare mothers to help young people learn**, to read, to do basic math problems, we could be resolving many problems simultaneously. These women could develop work-related skills (showing up on time, for example). These mothers might learn to become peacemakers, helping children to resist violent solutions...

Women who develop improved skills to work with children might become mentors for others in their neighborhoods. Women who work in the schools might ride the school bus and maintain discipline, helping children to begin the school day without agitation and with an attitude of respect for authority. And these women could be home when their children and their neighbors' children arrive home after school. As mentors to school children, they might be more supportive and helpful to their own children when there is homework to be done." Hmmm.

- The formation of **parent-led and community-based education reform groups**, is an exciting dynamic. You've heard here in the past about examples like Parents Raising Educational Standards in Schools (PRESS) in Wisconsin, which *Education Week* used as an example of the increasing influence of parent-reformers. A relatively new one is the Arizona Parents Association for Children's Education, or APACE. APACE was formed to address the specific needs of parents, and provides a parent hotline to help them resolve problems. "Parents need to step up to the plate," says Onnie Shekershen, APACE founder and president. "We're a major piece of the pie, and there's a lot of misinformation out there about parents' rights and responsibilities." Of interest, Onnie told us one of the practices only recently stopped in her Kyrene district school was marking class placement cards with a "blue dot" to indicate high maintenance parents (read: overinvolved). The idea was to make sure no teacher got too many of those in one class. Who said that tracking was a thing of the past? Interested parents should call Onnie at (602) 831-2733.

- A **fascinating book on environmental education** just came out, bringing with it hundreds of examples of which many of us were unawares about the approach some programs take to making our children more environmentally conscious. *Facts Not Fear: A Parent's Guide to Teaching Children about the Environment*, by Michael Sanera and Jane Shaw, exposes some of the half truths that children are learning about the environment, and gives suggestions to parents about how to answer their children's questions as well as activities that parents and children can do together to gain a better understanding of environmental issues. And it's not just propaganda. Politics takes a back seat to education in this informative work. The June 16 issue of *Forbes* observes, "This is a straightforward, fact-filled, kid-friendly, scientifically-based antidote to unbalanced presentations...Any house with school-aged children should have this book," and it serves well principals and teachers, too. To obtain a copy, call Regnery Publishing, Inc. at (202) 546-5005.

- Policymakers would do well to pay attention to the progress of small, **community-based independent schools that are succeeding** where others fail, says, Joan Ratteray of the Institute for Independent Education. Writing in response to William Raspberry's May 30 *Washington Post* column and query as to what effective private, parochial and public schools know that the rest of us don't, Ratteray writes that "for years, those of us who labor in the world of alternative education... have been trying to share what we know with education policy makers...More than 400 community-based African-American independent schools throughout the country are educating more than 70,000 youngsters every year. Few know that only Catholic schools educate more inner city children in private schools. Large numbers of the children we educate go on to some of the finest colleges and universities...Low to middle-income mothers, fathers, grandparents, aunts and uncles who sacrifice in order

to place their children in [these] schools are seeing a positive difference in the education of their children...They are grass-roots people... and they could help us see the larger problem of educating our children — if we paid some attention... The Institute phone number is (202) 745-0500.

- In **the equity wars**, Ohio is the latest of 10 states to have their school financing ruled unconstitutional by state supreme courts. (20 others face challenges) But true to form, the courts ignore any proposals to use existing resources more effectively, says the Buckeye Institute for Public Policy Solutions in Dayton, despite research that shows a consistent disconnect between spending and student achievement. Over thirty scholars recently signed on to a Buckeye resolution on public school funding reform, which recommends that the state seek “to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the current system by allowing competitive bidding and privatization for support services, school-based management, charter schools, evaluation and repeal of state mandates, school choice, performance contracts for personnel, and achievement-based funding.” An ambitious agenda, but one that’s obviously much more on the mark than these out-of-touch judges dictated.
- New Jersey is also in the throws of attempting to solve **the court’s latest objections to disparities in funding** begun back in the 70s. This time, the court actually recommended accountability in exchange for parity. It ordered the state Commissioner to not only increase funding to 28 impoverished districts to bring them to eventual parity with the \$8,181 state average, but to ensure funds are used “effectively and efficiently” to improve student achievement, and to develop a plan for replacing dilapidated buildings in poor areas. This could be a stepping stone for some strong accountability measures, all too lacking in school districts, regardless of how much money they have. Yet unless policymakers understand that expenditures cannot truly be accountable unless they flow to and are tracked at the school building with autonomy for their use and effectiveness, we’ll be sitting in the same swamplands as NJ. Courts need to adopt the mantra *Show Me The Money!* before making determinations that may not have the intended effects.

## Parting Thoughts

With all the hand wringing over the cost of education, I still get amazed and beset when I hear stories of absolute bloat and waste. Try this one on for size. New Hampshire, which was the last holdout in the Goals 2000 money wars, succumbed to pressure by signing up this year. The argument was that NH was being deprived of so much money that it could put to good use in its schools, given the difficulty states are having these days trying to teach an increasingly diverse pool of students.

So what does New Hampshire do with the money? \$1.7 million was distributed to 16 of the state’s 160 school districts to be used for planning, as noted by a Conway parent and confirmed by minutes of the State Board of Education’s February 24 meeting. They read: “...the districts will receive their full two years of funding this year. The total amount of money available to New Hampshire in July is approximately \$1,728,000. This amount represents the “first-year” money to the state...For this first year, the apportionment of dollars is 60%-40%. Sixty percent is allotted to the local

districts, and up to forty percent remains at the state level. These moneys are not simply bureaucratic administrative dollars to be used by the state. They will be **targeted to assist local districts to stimulate their capacity to develop effective programs at the local level relative to enhancing the academic achievement level of students.**"

*That's not bureaucratic???* Some may think me hasty. Perhaps you know of a few students who could benefit from *stimulating their local district capacity to develop effective programs?* It reminds me of a statement I've quoted here before. Upon taking office as the elected Superintendent of Public Instruction in Arizona in 1994, Lisa Graham Keegan observed that she could tell the state program offices from the federal ones. "Walk through the department and you can tell the difference between the offices that handle state programs and those with federal programs. The federal ones have the new furniture." Nuf said.



To those of you in the schools — we wish you best preparing for the new school year! To everyone — brace yourself for an exciting fall! See ya!

Jeanne Allen