

Dear Friends:

Neither rain, nor snow nor dark of night...Just when you thought you'd soon be done with the last missive we sent, here we are back in your mailbox for yet another dose. This month, we treat you to bird's eye views of a couple of neat schools, concerns about content-free zones despite ever louder cries for high standards, and a look at what George Orwell might write if he were here today.



A Place Called Hope

There's a place called HOPE that deserves the name for all the right reasons. Cleveland's HOPE schools are succeeding because people are caring enough to ensure that their students are as academically challenged as any other child in this country. It's a lesson that is hopefully not lost on one very important person from another place called HOPE - Hope, Arkansas - whose own opportunity to attend a private, albeit Catholic school, for several years no doubt contributed to his rise to President of the United States.

The two existing HOPE schools are private, non-sectarian schools serving over 700 children in grades K-4, soon to be K-5. They are those "voucher" schools that are widely scorned by the ACLU and cronies, and yet you'd never know, walking down their orderly hallways and peering in their buzzing classrooms, that a national controversy of epidemic proportions was being waged to get children out of those classrooms.

I was fortunate to tour HOPE Central recently. The teachers were abuzz about the progress their children were making. The school's focus is on the progress of every child, and teachers work with children in groups and individually to ensure that any child not up to par gets there. With a sense of mission and purpose, HOPE teachers, many of whom are new, but all of whom are certified, have developed programs, classroom structure and methods to reach all of their children, with no excuses about how much of a burden society has placed on them. Rather than blaming society for failure, the HOPE academies are demanding, and getting, excellence, proving that any child can succeed at a school that delivers high-enough expectations, strong leadership, good tools and a nurturing environment.

It's amazing to look into the eyes of these HOPE children and see that no one has treated them as if they couldn't learn, no one has relegated them to second-class status, and, at least through the fifth grade — and maybe beyond, no one will.

And Hope in the “Valley of the Sun”

I was also recently struck by the hope that was so clearly present in the faces of children and teachers at the NFL- Youth Education Town (YET) (formerly called Esperanza) and ATOP Academy charter schools, both in Phoenix, AZ.

The largely Hispanic NFL-YET charter school is a safe haven for children K-12 who were once relegated the war zone of their assigned schools. Now, they are surrounded by school buildings vibrant with bright colors, classrooms and outside recreational areas bustling with tremendous activity, and staff putting forth in continual efforts to engage their minds. Heather, the ecology teacher, supervises a student-built eco-system that allows science to be a hands-on and natural activity. Her kids also plant gardens and convert yard scraps into compost. Learning for them, was — well — natural and fun. It is the same for the younger Montessori kids, and for the older children, for whom violence and gang warfare appear to be things of the past. The recipient of a \$1 million NFL grant, NFL-YET boasts a regulation size football field, media center, and adult-learning center in cooperation with Maricopa Community College.

ATOP has long been a favorite at CER, because of its ability to increase the level of education provided to the children entering its doors, the strict order and discipline, as well as the love it conveys to these children, and the high degree of parental involvement it engenders. Now that ATOP has a sister school in Tempe, and the results are being replicated, its detractors can no longer call it an anomaly. In fact, founder Ray Jackson chuckles when he tells visitors that his 720-student school is housed in the former Arizona Education Association building, headquarters of the very group that opposed that which made this school possible. When we visited ATOP, the great things we had always heard and written about were made all the more apparent: What a great school, and how lucky those children are!

Then there's the flip side. A young intern applicant came recently to The Center, and told a tragic, though not surprising story of her first experience with American city schools. Her family emigrated to New York from Puerto Rico when she was 11, and from the time she and her two sisters arrived, they were put into Spanish-only classes, with the promise that there they would learn English. Up until they reached the eighth grade, they remained in these classes, and learned only a modicum of English. Only when they went to high school — and demanded placement in regular classes — did they begin their formal English schooling, and

not having had much exposure, they struggled. Her comment that the school identified bilingual students by their surname, regardless of whether they spoke English or not, was most telling. And the high school she and her sisters attended wanted to track them into the City University System only, despite the fact that they all wanted to apply to more rigorous private colleges. But perseverance triumphs against all odds, and the good news (and bad news — our loss) is that our intern applicant is too busy working

on her masters in public policy to work here now, one sister is in law school, and the other is on a medical school track.

Perhaps if all children had access to schools like HOPE, NFL-YET and ATOP, not to mention countless others succeeding “despite demographics,” we wouldn’t have to witness such stories, and better yet for those who ridicule these stories we often tell, we would have no cause to repeat them.

More On School Choice

- More HOPE is being offered to Ohio’s children through a private scholarship program. Parents Advancing Choice in Education announced the availability of 1,000 scholarships to low-income families in the Dayton area. As of mid-February, PACE had received just under 3,000 applications. In the nation’s capital, the Washington Scholarship Fund has received over 7 times as many applications as it has available scholarships —at least 13% of the city’s eligible students have applied.

- An interesting analysis has caught our attention, one about the effects of various “go-to-college-free-if-you-do-well” offers similar to the I Have A Dream concept. It seems that sometime ago, the Kauffman Foundation ended their efforts which promised college scholarships and support to high performing high school students. The program apparently ended after they realized that poorly performing ninth graders rarely improved throughout their high school career if left in the same environment. “What we didn’t know when we started was that the incentive you offer young people in the ninth grade will not motivate them to be successful for four years. We found that students coming out of the public schools were ill-prepared to do what we asked them to do,” said an official of the Kauffman Foundation in a *New York Times* piece last fall.

Children that did thrive and that graduated at a rate nearly double all the rest of the children chosen were those that Kauffman sent to parochial high schools. Similar programs have failed in trying to transform children whose very school setting may be the deterrent. Children with few alternatives are not likely to rise to the challenge if the odds are against them. Those whose support may have languished in the same way may want to seek involvement with programs that provide more immediate gains, such as those mentioned in the previous bullet.

From the States

- **Detroit may be ripe for a takeover after all**, if its school superintendent’s plans go into effect. Readers may recall that Michigan governor John Engler suggested that the state’s intervention might turn around this district where the percentage of children who graduate in four years is only 29%. But cries of local control dominated, and Detroit remains on its own. So the superintendent’s plan is to institute piecemeal programs such as site-based management, additional counseling services, character education and some personnel shifts. Research studies of districts that have undertaken similar initiatives find no measurable achievement gains. For those who doubt us, take

a look at Los Angeles and Philadelphia and tell us whether millions in Annenberg money, business partnerships, red-alert status and the like have yielded improvements.

- **A major Florida university is in danger** of losing its accreditation by the self-appointed dons of teacher education at the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education — not because its students are being at all educationally deprived or because of any question about its quality. Rather, Florida State University has supposedly failed the diversity course. NCATE thinks neither its student population nor its teaching staff is diverse enough. Rather than trying to put its own house in order (NCATE accredits the colleges of education that produce the lion's share of teachers — those who recent surveys and objective data show are sorely lacking in basic content knowledge and other skills), NCATE is meddling in others' affairs, based not on issues of quality but on their own politically correct guidelines. So we were thrilled to hear that a new teacher accreditation group may form due to rumblings of dissatisfaction with NCATE. Such a move may get the backing of reform-minded state commissioners who are wary of NCATE, whose prescriptions for teachers don't match what the public demands and what children need.

- And was that **rhetorical progress on education reform** from the national bully pulpit? U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley, stumping at the most recent National Association of State Boards of Education national conference, conceded, "Almost every where I go I find parents, educators and community leaders who agree that we've got to end the status quo, pick up the pace of improvement, increase accountability and refuse to accept mediocrity. I agree with them." But then, being sure to throw meat to the lions: "I am most distressed by some of the overheated rhetoric some are using to miss-characterize public education today, usually when they are promoting the silver bullet solution of vouchers." Could that be called the two-step?

And the Survey Says!

.....The popular magazine *Good Housekeeping* ran across sentiments similar to those that so impressed Secretary Riley. Obviously skeptical of the quality of education being delivered these days, 84% of those polled said that teachers should be periodically re-tested to retain their teaching license, and the majority thought tenure made it difficult or expensive to dismiss incompetent teachers. Of the 42% who initially favored tenure, 30% change their minds when told that most American workers don't enjoy similar job protection.

.....A Reality Check conducted by Public Agenda in January had more grim findings. They found that those perhaps most in the know on the quality of today's public school graduates — their ultimate education "consumers," college professors and employers — held a dim view of the skills high school students are attaining. Seventy-six percent and 63% respectively believe that "a high school diploma is no guarantee that the typical student has learned the basics." Similarly, a solid majority feel that students are weak on the skills needed to succeed in college or on the job, little more than a third rank students' basic math skills as good or excellent, and little more than a quarter are satisfied with students' ability to write clearly. The majority did think students were good at working with others. On the other hand, parents (and to an even greater

degree, teachers and students) are much more optimistic about the skills their children are getting in school, but ultimately profess ignorance as to where their child's performance ranks against other students. Seventy three percent feel they know little or nothing about how their child compares to other students in the state, and the percentages rise to 80% and 87% respectively when making national or international comparisons. Clearly, as Riley has found, parents are frustrated. Imagine if they really knew what was going on. (To check out all the results, visit Public Agenda's website at <http://www.publicagenda.org>)

On the Charter Front

- A breath of fresh air: **Colorado Commissioner of Education** Bill Moloney said, "I regard [charter schools] as one of the most important reform initiatives in the United States today. We should see charter schools not as a sign of danger, but as a sign of hope, not as a threat, but as a vital opportunity."
- What a guy, that new Governor of Massachusetts! Our hats off to Paul Celucci for wanting to **raise the cap on charter schools to 75**, a commitment many say that he'll stick to. Perhaps while he's at it, he can revisit the law that was weakened last year despite a modest cap increase and give charter operators the flexibility they need... Support for charters is also clearly emanating from New York Governor George Pataki again, and several minority lawmakers in Albany have been swayed by nationwide evidence of success...lots of other legislative efforts are brewing and in tow, but they change daily so we'll catch up with you next month.
- The ticker tape of charter numbers has just emanated from CER's machine, and the **total operating or approved for 1998 appears to be approaching 1,000**. We hear from states that they are pleased by this crop, a particularly well-scrutinized bunch of applicants, as far as we can tell from current application processes. The Philadelphia school board's approval of 11 (with six more elsewhere in the state) is great news, particularly because it includes some good friends like the Ogontz Avenue Revitalization Corp., of which Philly Rep. Dwight Evans is a part. The only hitch in the city of Brotherly Love is that it seems like every time they approve a charter, they argue they are losing millions of dollars. Educating children = lose millions?? We'll work on this one.
- Incidentally, **CER's latest Charter School Directory** is being printed as we write; including profile information on about 850 schools, as well as a year-by-year, state-by-state breakdown of numbers, newly available national and state-by-state enrollment and grades-served figures, results from our 1996-97 Survey of Charters, and more. The directory is a modest \$9.95 plus \$3.00 S&H. The cost covers printing, labor and a copy to every charter school, so it's a worthy cause. Call, send money or e-mail today.
- Now to the inland empire in the Golden State, where **a group of Redlands' parents were blocked from realizing their dreams** by the teachers' union. The union sent out a memo warning members that the charter could result in inferior working conditions, and though they later retracted the statement, the damage had been done. Some teachers who had signed the Redlands' group's charter petition, later called to retract their name for fear of retribution from the union. In fact, the union president

told a reporter that “Charter schools take away our ability to negotiate a fair contract for our teachers. They hurt our clout...I would have a hard time endorsing any charter school that didn’t come in and say ‘I’m going to pay teachers exactly what you pay them, give them the same rights your teachers have and basically hold the same contract your teachers hold.’ For some people, it seems like we’re putting money before education....” You said it! Stories of union blockades against charters abound, and grow daily. Not surprisingly, despite outcries against such interference, the California legislature hasn’t been able to alter its law. As long as lawmakers on the education committees are bonded to the CTA, says state Senator John Lewis, change will not come soon.

- “Change? What’s change?” Such could be heard emanating from the halls of the San Luis Obispo, CA school board forum, where by a 4-3 majority, the board voted that it will close down the two-year old **Bellevue-Sante Fe charter school** — despite academic achievement —if an initiative that promises to strengthen the state’s highly bureaucratic charter law makes it to the ballot. While the school has nothing to do with the initiative — which incidentally, is endorsed by San Carlos superintendent Don Shalvey and several widely respected business leaders to name just a few — Superintendent Edwin Denton added what is being called “the poison bill” because he feared that the initiative might erode his authority over the charter school, which is, hmmm, well, very likely.
- With lots of calls and questions about last issue’s reference to the teachers unions demanding private information about teachers from charter schools, we reprint copies of their letters to Michigan charters below. These letters are nearly identical to those sent also to all charter schools in Arizona, California, Colorado, Massachusetts and possibly others.

From Patricia Olshefski, Director of Field Services, American Federation of Teachers, Washington DC, to every public academy (charter school) in Michigan:

In accordance with the Freedom of Information Act, 5 U.S.C. 552 *et. seg.* and the laws in your state, I request that your school furnish information regarding charter school teachers.

Specifically, I am requesting the most current list of teachers at your school. In addition I also ask for their home addresses.

And an even more aggressive communiqué from Robert G. Harris, Michigan Education Association Public Education Advocacy Consultant, to charter sponsors:

This is a request for information made under the Michigan Freedom of Information Act. For each charter school authorized by your organization, please provide:

1. Name, address, telephone number and administrator
2. Name and address of each teacher employed at the charter school.
3. A copy of each teacher’s professional credentials, including certification. In the absence of a copy of the credentials, identify the type of certification for each teacher.

As provided by Section 5 of the Act, you must provide this information within five (5) working days of your receipt of this request. If you deny this request in whole or in part, I expect to receive written notification of this decision as provided in Section 5(4)(a-d).

More on the Unions

- O.K., let me see if we have this straight: There are letters going out to charter schools asking for name, rank and serial number of teachers...There are now monthly full page ads in *Time Magazine* from AFT's prez that enables them en masse to spread complete nonsense to over 4.5 million people (and which costs upwards of \$6 million per year)....and there's a bunch of guys and gals from both unions running around the country doing editorial board meetings, holding hands with new lawmakers, and now, planning their own merger.....Who said they weren't running for their lives? Read on...
- From the Joint Progress Report on the union merger issued by AFT and NEA chiefs (which sounds more like a excerpt from Orwell's '1984'):

“...The New Organization's core jurisdiction, education, will cover every category of employee in public education and education-related public agencies and institutions, from pre-school through graduate school and lifetime learning.”

Under 'The AFL-CIO Affiliation:'

“Today, public education — the route to prosperity for millions of American families and a cornerstone of our democracy — is being challenged as never before. At the same time, real individual incomes are falling and inequality is rising, access to health care is increasingly narrowed, and public services are constantly squeezed. As a result, neither the men nor women who work in education nor the families of our students can offer our nation's children the future they deserve. A strong, vital renewed labor movement would be a powerful ally of public education that could set America back on course. As an AFL-CIO affiliate, The New Organization could help build the renewed labor movement America needs.”

(Now, try reading that to a friend or spouse, without identifying it, and ask them to guess from which organization it hails. Six-two and even they never peg groups claiming to represent education!)

To get the latest on the goings on of the “New Organization” in all its forms, consider tuning in to Mike Antonucci's regular Education Intelligence Agency communiqués, available by fax or e-mail. Call (916) 422-4373 or send e-mail to EduIntel@aol.com.

Fuzzy Wuzzy

- Our friends know of our great — and educated — disdain for what children are currently being given that is called 'math.' Here's an example, taken right out of Addison-Wesley's third grade text:

2 x 10 is _____ because _____.

Give up yet? How about “because IT IS!!!” Please note that the explanation scores higher points than the answer to 2 x 10, which is hardly third grade material!

- And to further our regrettable stroll down “dumbing down” lane:

With NAEP scores being what they are for so many children — unabashedly low, that is — most would agree that our children need to be exposed to more, not less content instruction. All those, except, of course, for the *Don't Worry, Be Happy* Chorus, which continues to allege nirvana in public education. But we can't imagine that even they would abide the treatment that the foundation of the U.S. Government is given in Macmillan-McGraw Hill's third grade text.

QUIZ: *What are the three branches of Government?*

If you thought the answer was Legislative, Executive and Judiciary, you're not quite right. For in today's genre of dumbing down our kids, the publishers and the establishment obviously think the whole truth is too much for our kids. So instead, they are given the following answer: Congress, President and the Supreme Court. Of course, this same book thinks it's critical to spend an entire page telling about children who have lived in the White House. And nowhere in the whole book is the text of The Declaration of Independence reprinted. The idea is there, but the substance isn't. Geez.

- So, what would you use to track such teachings? Why, fuzzy report cards, what else, now called progress reports, with nary a letter or number grade in sight. Editorial editor Linda Gagnetti of the *Cincinnati Enquirer* provides a review of the latest trend in feel-good education. She reports that one school grades elementary students on 72 different skills; instead of A to F, performance is ranked from 'expanding' to 'emergent.' Failing – oops, I mean lagging, no, ah, emergent – students have 'areas of concern' that 'need more time to develop.' Discipline issues are charted as 'social habits.' No wonder parents are confused, clueless and frustrated. As Hudson Institute's Bruno Manno says, "People believe that the pony express of public education needs a radical and fundamental change in the 'Fed Ex' world of the 21st century. Making the pony run faster is not good enough when what is needed is public education's version of overnight mail."

Now *this* is a test!

This time last year, we printed excerpts of an 1885 HS Entrance Exam. Now, courtesy of Triton College professor John Wager, we provide you with some questions from a college entrance exam, circa 1932. The school was Normal College, (now known as Northeastern Illinois University). The exam was administered by none other than the City of Chicago, Board of Examiners. [The full text is linked from this MONTHLY LETTER on our Web site (<http://www.edreform.com>) or go direct to http://www.triton.cc.il.us/undergrad_ctr/1932test.html.

(for those right-brained readers:)

Make an isometric drawing of a sink drain suitable as a seventh grade problem.

Write a short paragraph on: Man's place in the animal kingdom [today we'd have to say 'person's' place] or The effect of alcohol on the nervous system.

Write a brief story of the life of George Washington. This must include information about all his activities that affected the life of the Nation.

Why did Europeans want a water route to the East in the fifteenth century? Draw a map and explain. Tell about the colonial governments and the local governments of the two colonies, Connecticut and Virginia.

Words from the Wise

“For he who innovates will have for his enemies all those who are well off under the existing order of things, and only lukewarm supporters in those who might be better off under the new. This lukewarm temper arises partly from the fear of adversaries who have the laws (present organization) on their side, and partly from the incredulity of mankind, who will never admit the merit of anything new, until they have seen it proved by the event.

The result, however, is that whenever the enemies of change make an attack, they do so with the zeal of partisans while the others defend themselves so feebly as to endanger both themselves and their cause...”

Niccolo Machiavelli, 1513

“Gargantuan industry and government, woven into an intricate computerized mechanism, leave the person outside. The sense of participation is lost, the feeling that ordinary individuals influence important decisions vanishes, and man becomes separated and diminished.

When an individual is no longer a true participant, when he no longer feels a sense of responsibility to his society, the content of democracy is emptied. When culture is degraded and vulgarity enthroned, when the social system does not build security but induces peril, inexorably the individual is impelled to pull away for a soulless society. This process produces alienation – perhaps the most pervasive and insidious development in contemporary society.”

Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.

(Courtesy of charter guru Eric Premack, who sees relevance in the late MLK's words for the charter movement: "as our traditional districts build ever-larger schools and merge into huge 'unified' (what an oxymoron) districts, charter schools are thinking small. [The passage] may have a lot to say about why these schools seem to be working – and why school boards are becoming so irrelevant.")



We believe the groundhog was wrong, and spring is in sight! Here's hoping that warmer climates bring freedom from that "El Nino thing" and lots of warm and wonderful results from all the reform activity we're lucky enough to be a party to.

Jeanne Allen