



1001 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Suite 204 • Washington, DC 20036

Tel 202-822-9000
Fax 202-822-5077

MONTHLY LETTER TO FRIENDS OF
THE CENTER FOR EDUCATION REFORM
No. 54

JUNE, 1999

Dear Friends:

School's Out! The kids are home, in camp or summer school and most legislators have gone away — for now. Still, it's amazing what can happen in a month, which we were barely able to condense for you. As you'll see, lots of activity on accountability and choice programs nationwide has a bizarre effect on people...



"I'm Melting.....!"

Like the Wicked Witch of the West when the water doused her for good, school choice opponents are uttering their last gasps of desperation in response to near or clear victories for school reform.

Our Oz award of the month, for most outrageous behavior, goes to Pennsylvania State Representative Joe Preston, who in the midst of a debate over Governor Ridge's Academic Recovery Plan for FAILING (mind you, not successful, but failing) school districts said (in apparent reference to child molesters and pedophiles):

"Unfortunately, people in certain religions have been hit hard by an awful lot of lawsuits [and] I don't want to see our money to be able to go for those different lawsuits for certain people who do not act appropriately."

Our runner-up Oz award goes to the Pennsylvania's superintendents' association, which compared the effects of vouchers to the balkanization and genocide witnessed in Kosovo. They must have been talking to Arizona State University professor David Berliner. He's the guy who goes around telling people that there's no problem in public education that a little more money couldn't cure.

Berliner told a group in May that, "Voucher programs would allow for splintering along ethnic and racial lines. Our primary concern is that voucher programs could end up resembling the ethnic cleansing now occurring in Kosovo." By the way — Berliner trains teachers for a living.

Finally, garnering the Oz-honorable mention, is the Pennsylvania State Education Association, whose website carries a picture of Chilean Dictator Augusto Pinochet as a supporter of vouchers.

Now mind you, this is the same PSEA whose February newsletter carried an article by a guy expressing vehement anti-Catholic sentiments. Forrest J. Troy wrote, "The Catholic hierarchy's chronic assaults are designed to pick up federal aid to religious schools via vouchers." More than a few PSEA members got upset. As Hempfield, PA member Daniel Burns wrote, "Mr. Troy demeans Catholic tradition and beliefs by spreading the incorrect notion that Catholic teaching is designed to secure financial gain...I hope PSEA will demonstrate respect for all of its dues-paying members by exercising greater sensitivity..."

We'll see.

And Now for the Tin Man Prize

The Tin Man, who joined his friends on the yellow brick road in search of a heart, is our emblem this month for those compassionate sentiments that embody the intentions of school reformers.

Referring to New York's recent evaluation of teachers, where less than one percent were found unsatisfactory in the face of statistics showing growing numbers of children unable to read (see story on page 4), the *NY Daily News* (6/6/99) suggested:

"Principals must be held accountable, too, for their role. If teachers fail to make the grade and that principal fails to show them the door, that principal must be put on notice. Ditto for superintendents who tolerate their consistent failure. It all begins with a simple standard — Are children learning? If the answer is no, then heads — adult heads — must roll."

The Cowardly Lion

Ohio lawmakers knee-deep in education bills this month set out to limit the number of charter schools, rather than let them run their course, as intended by the original law. State Senator Robert Gardner from Madison, Ohio endorsed the bill, saying, "The cap is designed to limit the program until studies can measure how well they are working." Thus, Gardner is our first-ever Cowardly Lion recipient.

The Scare Crow

Where was Luis Vera when the White House convened its Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic-Americans on June 4? Where was Joseph C'diBaca? These folks, from a chapter of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and Hispanic Education, Inc. respectively, are leading the charges in their communities to bring about better schools through bold reforms. Yet, they weren't invited to the White House conference. Rather than embrace locally supported efforts, Education Secretary Dick Riley called upon participants to reject choice and embrace federal programs to train new teachers. Congratulations Secretary Riley for achieving our Scare Crow award.

Special Events

Well, the White House might not recognize them, but the Center for Education Reform does. Luis and Joseph are among the speakers at the Center's summer *Leader's Forum* on July 15 in Washington, DC, just steps from the White House. **LESSONS FROM THE FRONT: TRIUMPHS IN EDUCATION REFORM FROM THE RAINBOW** will highlight the real stories of real people involved in urgent, dramatic and passionate calls for change, most notably, using charter schools and choice as vehicles. Call Amanda at 1-800-521-2118 if you're interested in attending the July 15 event at the Hay Adams Hotel.

Catch a Wave!

Like those beautiful rings formed when stones are tossed into water, school reform is *rippling* across the nation through a myriad of reform efforts. When it comes to charters, in particular, dozens of school districts are responding to the ripples being caused by school reform.

Consider the move by Capistrano, California district superintendent James Fleming, who wants to create the state's first charter school district.

And just months after the Edison project began negotiating with Toledo, Ohio officials to open a new school, Toledo decided to copy the Edison model and create its own Edison-like school.

These and dozens more ripple effects are documented for the first time ever in a new, pathbreaking report on charter schools, issued by The Center For Education Reform this month. Our third in the "Progress Report" series (the first two documented charter school achievement and failures and continue to be updated), **Part III, The Ripple Effect** demonstrates the actual impact this comparably small movement is having on the behemoth known as the public education system. Call us for your copy, or if you're a member, yours is on its way!

Florida's Wave

The ink isn't even dry on Florida's new accountability and school choice law and already behaviors are starting to change in public schools. In Pasco County, some schools just barely eked-by on the state's requirements, earning Ds rather than Fs. To avoid the possibility that the schools fall into the F category in the future and lose students to vouchers, teachers and officials have already met to figure out how to improve student achievement, and have called in consultants to help them do it. Other schools started before, and have been drilling students since last year to encourage school improvement.

New York Charters Approved

While claims of new unionism abound, actions still belie union intentions. When the State University of New York, as a charter school authorizer, announced the state's first eight charters to be approved, was the union waiting for them with open arms? Did they immediately offer their services in providing technical assistance? Did they take a minute to review the schools approved and suggest any new and creative partnerships?

No. No. And No.

Well, let us be among the other dozens of friendly groups in New York and elsewhere to say, "Willkommen, Bienvenue, Bienvenidos and Welcome," to New York's first eight charters! You may not find immediate friends among education groups there, but a bounty of friends, partnerships and networking opportunities await you.

Among the schools approved were an Urban League/Advantage School partnership in Albany, two direct instruction schools in Harlem, the Harbor Science and Arts Charter in Manhattan and the Flushing International School.

Who Me?

Both New York State's school boards group and the unions complained that they weren't in the charter loop. Both groups intimated that the charter school authorizer and friends must be hiding a nasty thing to make approvals so quickly and without their knowledge.

But perhaps the most absurd comment comes from a spokesperson of the United Federation of Teachers, who in the face of continued dismal scores, atrocious schools and contaminated union contracts had the nerve to say:

"Why the big rush?"

Why, rush, indeed? Why, we wonder of the UFT, did they rush to lobby the introduction of a bill in the legislation (which gratefully died) to require unionization of all charter schools? Why did they rush to have a bill requiring unionization of non-teaching personnel?

Why rush, indeed? Afterall:

- "Most of the State's 4th Graders Fail a New 3-Day English Test," screamed the *New York Times*, 5/26/99. In the big apple (where our "Who Me?" friend works) 67% of children failed the test.
- Math and reading scores also dropped dramatically, with third graders posting the most losses.

- Even in Westchester, NY, 42 percent of 12th graders who took the Regent's English exam failed last year.

- The largest supplier of NY teachers, the education school at the City University of New York, is threatened with extinction if the school doesn't improve its program. Just 62% of teachers who took the licensing test in 1996 passed. Two of CUNY's schools, City College and Medgar Evers, "boasted" 40% and 39% pass rates, respectively.

Why rush, indeed?

(N.B. UFT's parent — AFT — has a subcommittee of sorts that was recently treated to a survey of charter school teachers. The results mirror a similar survey that the NEA performed last year. Both found (like a myriad of state studies we've reported) that charter school teachers are overwhelmingly satisfied — in the absence of unions, that is.)

From the Trenches

- Word about **Ohio's Supreme Court decision** concerning school choice has made its way around the country and is the subject of the legislature's current efforts to make it right. The Supreme Court on May 27 found that the 1995 law authorizing the Cleveland Scholarship Program violated the single-subject rule, because it was tucked into a 1,070 page, multi-subject budget bill. The justices, in a 5-2 decision, did find that the program on its own would pass constitutional muster. "Whatever link between government and religion is created by the school-voucher program is indirect, depending only on the 'genuinely independent and private choices' of individual parents who act for themselves and their children, not the government," said the court.

As we write, Ohio lawmakers are trying to authorize the program the right way, in an education budget bill. Ohio and Florida will both be hot news as fall nears, as the programs attract their share of lawsuits (your tax dollars at work) and darts from our friends in the Blob.

- Recent **national assessments** caused rejoicing in several states, but a closer look reveals that some states may have benefited from unusually large exclusion rates of special needs children from test taking. Gains in such states as Connecticut, Kentucky and Maryland all but disappeared when the children excluded were accounted for. Apparently, that fact was not available when Vice President Gore made the announcement of NAEP test score progress earlier this spring. We're glad he has the right information now, and look forward to an accurate debate among the presidential contenders before the year is up over how to tolerate low levels of achievement among the majority of our students.

- **Even Texas** (where many eyes are riveted) excluded 27% more special education children than last year from its noteworthy TAAS test. While it is unfair to compare special needs children with average students, the tests should still be administered so that all children's needs can be gauged.

- In the Los Angeles Unified School District, a revised and more accurate way of assessing **the dropout problem** revealed that nearly 30 percent of students don't make it to graduation day, according to California Parents for Educational Choice president Alan Bonsteel. In San Francisco in 1997, 38% of the kids didn't graduate.

Also in San Francisco, the *Examiner* reviewed **claims that test scores have increased** since 1993. Upon closer scrutiny, however, "the analysis found that between 1988 and 1998, when enrollment rose by 175 students, the district reported 8,190 fewer reading scores...[o]f 54,169 students in eligible grades in 1988, the district reported 39,129 matched scores (children who've taken the test at the same school for two consecutive years) or 72 percent. In 1998, with 54,563 eligible students, the district reported...56 percent [of scores]."

- **What's Good for the Goose?** Colleges and universities are reeling from a little-known Department of Education set of guidelines (Office of Civil Rights) telling them that they need to temper the use of SATs or other standardized tests as a criteria for admissions.

While pitiful that the U.S. Department of Education would be party to this on one hand, as its officials call for higher standards on the other, the sad fact is that the very institutions which are now a target have brought this on themselves.

And here's how — Traditional higher education institutions love the strength of the Department of Education, and have been willing to jump through every hoop to ensure that they stay on the good side of Uncle Sam. That includes more intrusion, and more rules and regulations in exchange for more money. So the very institution they've helped to strengthen is attempting now to undermine the autonomy of colleges and universities in admissions.

- The May MONTHLY LETTER TO FRIENDS reminded readers of the dramatic success of **alternative certification**. This month brings another example of what happens when states dare to open up the profession. Last month, Massachusetts officials announced the recipients of its new signing bonus program to attract new, outstanding individuals to teaching. But while the \$20,000 bonus attracted attention, applicants said it was the alternative path the state created that drew them to the program. In fact, the characteristics of the new teachers reflects a greater diversity, depth and equality than one normally finds among the ranks of traditionally-credentialed teachers: forty-one percent are mid-career professionals age 30-60, coming from fields like biotechnology, math and science, journalism and television; forty-four percent are men; 56% are women; and 23% are minorities. With numbers like that, it's a wonder that every governor and legislature don't drop their traditional program right now and copy the Massachusetts model. *It's amazing how deplorable teachers' scores can affect a state.*

- A study done last year by two University of Wisconsin education professors concluded that their **state's system for training and licensing teachers** is costly, outmoded and has little connection to how teachers really learn their jobs. Professors Mark Schug and Richard Western recommend that the people doing the training of teachers be held accountable for how good their teachers are. They also believe that if the teachers and principals in the schools where they will teach were doing the training,

they would have a greater incentive to get the right person and train him well. School districts unsatisfied with the training their teachers receive could do their own training.

- There are exceptions to every rule. The Wisconsin Association of School Boards has been fighting to institute a performance-based system of teacher education and licensure. Opposite WASB is the state's education bureaucracy (DPI), which WASB argues is stuck in "the outmoded and bureaucratic structures that underlie existing teacher education and licensure."

WASB found itself earlier this spring fighting the state's big push to enact the union-backed rules. The Wisconsin Education Association Council wrote to its members, "for the last two years, portions of the proposal have been introduced to the [union] board...Board members indicated that this proposal is sound...[T]hey felt that the DPI proposal would put us in a much better position to defend against the attacks on the profession." The WASB succeeded in slowing the train, and the rules are still on the table for public comment.

One other interesting point — DPI's web page leads inquirers about teacher education to the union's web page.

- The group **Education Trust** says that **teacher tests** are nothing more than low-level exams. Not one of the tests now used to assess prospective teachers tests college-level knowledge. The report, "Not Good Enough: A Content Analysis of Teacher Licensing Examinations" is available by writing the group at 1725 K. Street, NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC, 20006.
- **Standards in Nevada.** The State Board of Education might need some help defining the term "standards." It seems that calculators may soon be permitted on the state's 11th grade proficiency test, which is actually pegged to 8th grade skills. Even the standards for passing are low, requiring only 64 percent. Employers think it should be at least 80 percent for non-skilled workers.

On Charter Schools

- Bankers are taking notice of established charter schools. That's a message that the Michigan Association of Public School Academies helped deliver at a recent financing workshop it held. Bankers told charter school leaders that charter schools with good business models and strong programs are a good investment. To wit, Park National Bank has loaned about \$12 million to **Michigan's** charter schools, and Citizens Bank has processed several bridge loans to help charters get started.

Banks are careful and cautious institutions. Their investment comes only after rigorous review and investigation. The involvement and support of banks nationwide should be yet another signal that charters are highly viable, accountable institutions.

- **New Jersey's** tango with curbing charter school growth died when the legislature adjourned, thanks to Commissioner Dave Hespe. Beginning last fall, the NJ education union and lawmakers from both parties tried to pass a bill regulating a new

form of public school choice and capping enrollment among both choice *and* charter schools. Eventually, the charter school community showed its strength, the lawmakers retreated, and wisdom prevailed...for now, as the next illustration makes clear.

- Charter schools are temporarily relieved over the failure of the **California** Teacher's Association to unionize all charter schools. A bill to require all charter teachers to belong to the union was killed successfully, but the compromise bill still raises concerns for many a charter person in and out of the Golden State. San Francisco Democrat Carole Migden, under orders from the CTA, finally backed down and instead introduced a bill that requires charter schools to claim that they are a public employer, or be forced to be part of the district of residence's collective bargaining agreement. Paperwork will increase, and no doubt CTA plans some mischief to bring charters under their umbrella. Stay tuned.

An F for *Connected Math*

What's so connected about *Connected Math*, a math program going into dozens of middle schools? It has received rave reviews, and to our shock and amazement, the National Science Foundation and the American Association for the Advancement of Science is rating it as one of the best.

Our friends concerned about "real" math think otherwise. Mathematically Correct, a California-based group focused upon improving math instruction, gave the program an F, citing the fact that *Connected Math* has "little mathematical content. Students leaving this course will have no background in or facility with analytic or pre-algebra skills." It is designed, they say, as "a series of discovery exercises instead of whole-class, teacher-directed instruction."



Join us again in July, and don't forget our award-winning website for frequent updates. As you embark on summer forays and excursions, keep safe, and have a happy respite. If you're heading toward or near Washington, DC, the door is always open. Happy Summer!


Jeanne Allen

PS. Thanks for your great reviews of *Parent Power!* Don't forget: if you want to continue receiving it or know others who do, you need to send back your subscription today!