

**MONTHLY LETTER TO FRIENDS OF
THE CENTER FOR EDUCATION REFORM
No. 6**

APRIL 11, 1994

Dear Friends:

In this month's issue: Administrators' group says schools A-OK; University of Chicago "researchers" claim that Hanushek's work on school spending is deeply flawed; Texas teachers union release attack on choice, and lots more. Also in this mailing, our three latest Action Papers.

Congratulations to Basic American CEO (and The Center's very own Chairman) Jerry Hume on his appointment to the California State Board of Education. Jerry's also a member of the National Assessment Governing Board which oversees NAEP and has been in the forefront of the national reform movement.



In the News

Newspapers around the country shed light on what educator groups, citizens and policy makers are doing and thinking on the issues.

Charter Successes: As reported in the Los Angeles Times on April 2, 1994, one of the 49 charter schools now established in California will report a surplus of \$1.2 million. "The San Fernando Valley's first charter school appears to be succeeding beyond even the most optimistic expectations.

"The Vaughn Next Century Learning Center in Pacoima will use the surplus to begin buying properties...to make room for a cultural center, a library and more than a dozen classrooms. Principal Yvonne Chan said most of the savings come from reduced administrative costs. Vaughn hires its own teachers, for example, rather than paying the district for personnel services.... Using its budget flexibility, the school was able to hire four new teachers, reduce class size from 32 to 26 and add a 27-computer lab and a teachers resource center."

Fenton Avenue School in Lake View Terrace expects a \$200,000 surplus by year's end, and two others charters, while opting to rely on the district for some services, project savings as well.

Choice Critics: As reported in the Dallas Morning News on March 30, 1994, "the 95,000-member Texas State Teachers Association conducted a yearlong study on school choice." The results: fewer than 1 percent of parents chose to send their child to another school in the 20 states that have some type of public school choice.

Based on this survey, association president Richard Kouri claims there is no groundswell of public demand for choice options. Regarding public-private choice plans, Kouri says Milwaukee has been "a dismal failure."

"Although the Texas State Teachers Association supports public school choice within school districts and the creation of charter schools [*though one would never know that by their release*], the organization is adamantly opposed to a voucher system, Mr. Kouri said. He said that private school vouchers are supported mainly by ultra-conservative groups."

That undoubtedly comes as a surprise to Texas State Representative Ron Wilson (D-Houston), who told the Dallas Morning News that "many minority parents in Texas would like the chance to use vouchers to send their children to the school of their choice. 'Parents of children in the public schools, and especially minority parents, understand that the public school system for the most part is just a big warehouse for the children.'"

Los Angeles Area Parents Enjoy Expanded Choices: According to the Los Angeles Times on March 26, 1994, many parents in the area are enjoying their options under a new public school choice act spurred by Proposition 174.

"Parents are buzzing: Finally, they can enroll their children anywhere in the system regardless of where they live.... [Parents are] interviewing principals, attending classes and orientation meetings, and collecting test scores. Even parents who were considering private schools are rethinking their options."

"The Board of Education this week gave parents more freedom to choose a new school within the Los Angeles district.... Parents in some Orange County school districts also have been busy discussing how parental choice may change their schools. 'People have been talking about it since Proposition 174 was proposed. We've had some choices before, but not this wide open. People like this.'"

"I'm totally consumed by this whole thing right now," said Janet DiMartino, a Sherman Oaks parent who is looking at public and private schools for her son. "The range is unbelievable."

Critics come from Boards of Education, who doubt any real impact from the program. It was authored by Assemblywoman Dede Alpert (D-Coronado) and sparked by the school voucher movement.

New Voices

We draw readers' attention this month to the American Association of Educators in Private Practice, a national networking organization of enterprising teachers "who have decided to take the risk of being in business for themselves." AAEP believes that those in the teaching profession should be treated as professionals, hired to "fulfill responsibilities" rather than just "fill a position." At a recent meeting in Washington, DC, AAEP representative Senn Brown and representatives from a wide variety of organizations discussed the need for charter schools and some obstacles that teachers in private practice face in the current system. These will be big topics of their annual meeting this July in Madison, Wisconsin. For more info contact AAEP President Chris Yelich at 1-800-252-3280.

A View from the Blob

The American Association of School Administrators released the results of a survey last week which, for them, demonstrated that the public likes their schools and, as a result, the schools are doing better than the doomsayers claim. "The closer people get to America's public schools, the better they look," said Paul Houston, the new executive director of AASA.

Interestingly, there are wide disparities between their conclusions and the results of the survey. Says Houston, "It's remarkable that 89 percent of public school parents give both the nation's schools and their own local public schools grades of A, B, or C." Is it? What parents would consider a "C" school (the grade given by 37% of the respondents) adequate for their child? And large city schools tip the scales in the other direction — 67% of public school parents give them a C, D or F. Of the entire group surveyed, only 40% felt they knew "a lot" about their local school, and a mere 18% felt they knew "a lot" about schools nationally.

AASA believes the closer one is to the school, the more one knows. In fact, U.S. schools give their constituents little information. While survey respondents said they felt principals, PTAs and superintendents were among the most reliable sources of school information, more of them get their information from television and newspapers than anywhere else. For more information, write AASA at 1801 North Monroe Street, Arlington, Virginia, 22209, or call The Center.

The National Association of Secondary School Principals has issued its survey of principals' salaries for 1993-1994. Salaries for principals in larger school districts are highest, with the average at \$70,465, and the high at \$93,895. The average for all principals in high schools is \$65,000, and the average high salary is \$108,000. Assistant Principal salaries range on average from \$44,000 to \$57,000, with large fluctuations on either end.

The American Federation of Teachers is on the warpath over Education Alternatives, Inc., and private contracting of school services. On March 30, AFT released a report claiming that "private managers' profits hinge on less instruction and larger classes in public schools." These allegations are in stark contrast to the reportings of both EAI and the schools in Baltimore, for example, who report that children in EAI managed schools have improved in reading and basic skills tests, while teacher aides and better services have been added. AFT's opposition to private contracting is shared by the bulk of education groups. This report is only a precursor of what is yet to come in their attack on school innovations that do not emanate from union leadership. Give us a call if you'd like a copy of their press release.

Misinformation Alert: Don't be surprised if you start seeing news articles that lead with something like "Experts Prove School Spending is Critical to Achievement After All." Last month, several researchers (we use that term lightly) at the University of Chicago reviewed the work of University of Rochester Economics Professor Eric Hanushek, and reported that his conclusions that spending has no bearing on performance do not hold water. This conclusion was published in this month's Education Researcher, put out by the American Educational Research Association, and made front page news in Education Week. The report is skewed in hundreds of different ways; some of the evidence that supports Hanushek's conclusion is in our enclosed piece on spending, but we'll be issuing a full rebuttal shortly.

Charter Update

- The list of charter schools chosen to start-up in Massachusetts is eclectic and diverse. Among them: a boarding school for homeless children, headed by a retired rear admiral; a "back to basics" school focusing on the three R's, founded by a group of parents; and a school for high school dropouts run by a community college. Says Massachusetts Education Secretary Piedad Robertson, "Most of the proposals address the needs of the child not able to succeed in current public schools." The Secretary's office has a list of all applicants and those chosen to date. Contact Ms. Robertson at The Executive Office of Education, One Ashburton Place, Room 1401, Boston, Massachusetts, 02108.
- Illinois Governor Jim Edgar wants to get twelve charters started. Chicago Mayor Richard Daley has voiced his support.

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One of the main functions of The Center for Education Reform is to serve as a national clearinghouse for all education matters of interest to reformers. As part of this, we've established the most comprehensive computer database of information and invite you to take advantage of this service. Please let us know how we can help you.

Jeanne