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

Happy Spring! As you may have noticed, the *Monthly Letter* had a brief, but unusual, mid-winter hiatus. During that time, we continued to put out weekly updates via the *CER Newswire* and several special alerts during National Charter School Week. And of course, those of you who frequent the web know that we maintained daily updates on pressing issues. Now it's time to sum up all that's transpired since we last addressed you, and as you're bound to learn from your experience with us this month, there is no dearth of effort – or controversy – in reforming America's schools today. Drop us a line and let us know if we've missed anything, or what you think about this *Monthly Letter* to Friends. Thanks for all you do!

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Highlights

- School choice proponents are on pins and needles waiting for the U.S. Supreme Court decision expected by late June. See page 7 for full story.
- Don't know much about history? We wish the lead-in of this famous Sam Cooke tune was just fantasy, but our children's history learning is "abysmal" according to those in-the-know. Check out the details on page 3.
- Is private management of public schools doomed because Edison Schools, Inc. is losing ground? Or is this just another result of the political obstacles in education that reformers must contend with? See story on page 10.
- Are you signed up for the National Charter School Conference? We'll be there, as will representatives from more than half the nation's charter schools. Details on page 9.
- Speaking of charter schools, CER's latest prediction about fall opening numbers will knock your socks off. We may see 20,000 charters by 2010 yet! Page 9 has the scoop.
- Who said kids were feeling over-pressured by the new era of standardized tests? Apparently, whoever they were didn't check with the kids. See Reality Check, page 10.
- The grassroots are challenging the conventional wisdom in schools today; CER profiles a handful of its grassroots Partners, who are doing magnificent work to get parents more choices and schools more control over what happens beneath their roofs. Go to page 7, s'il vous plait.

But First...Where's the Outrage?
The California Union's Power Grab

Why does the nation's largest, and in many ways most beautiful state continue to host the most radical, disastrous ideas? Lawmakers spent the last few months actually considering enacting a measure that would have given school employee unions unprecedented control of what happens in the classroom. The bill which would have done that, AB 2160, was finally withdrawn in the face of overwhelming opposition, but its provisions have only disappeared for the moment. What would it have done?

Imagine the Teamsters succeeding in controlling the financial program which accountants at the nation's "Big Five" accounting companies use.

Imagine the broadcast community's union dictating what music is played on privately owned radio stations.

Imagine the longshoremen telling the Navy what controls its ships can use before docking in longshoremen controlled piers.

No, it wouldn't happen in America, the land of the free and home of the brave. Or would it? In California, here's what the unions are trying to take control of:

1. The development and implementation of any program designed to enhance pupil academic performance.
2. The selection of textbooks and instructional material.
3. The development and implementation of local education standards.
4. The development and implementation of the definition of educational objectives, content of courses, and curriculum.
5. The development and implementation of any program to encourage parental involvement in student education. [*This is a good one -- the unions get to decide how parents will or will not be allowed to participate in schooling.*]

When the bill was first introduced, protests and opposition erupted from the Governor to almost every education group normally aligned with the unions. Even Los Angeles Superintendent Roy Romer said: "This measure is not about giving teachers more input, it's about an attempt by a powerful special interest group to seize control of the public school system at the expense of school children."

First the noise resulted in relatively insignificant changes to the bill. The unions said they'd agree to giving up bargaining power over all of the above, but would require all the same school policy issues to be the subject of formal negotiations between the school board and the union. If they couldn't agree, "mediators" (a fancy name for lower-level bureaucrats appointed by labor-relations boards) would take over.

As *Sacramento Bee* commentator Daniel Weintraub put it, "By relying on the union to appoint one side of the negotiating group and requiring mediation and appeals to the state labor practices board, the bill needlessly places education policy issues in the context of labor-management disputes that often turn adversarial."

There's another angle though, as we see it. What school board member is going to want to bring more contention and controversy into her life by taking on the union in negotiations? Very few. So, as is the intention, only the union (not teachers) would gain the upper hand in how schools are run. Unbelievable. The sponsor of the bill, while being forced to drop it for now, has assured the unions that she will bring up what they want piecemeal through other pieces of legislation, and CTA president Wayne Johnson has threatened to transform it into a ballot initiative.

California's beautiful ocean vista apparently doesn't make its leaders think any clearer. So if you're interested in the fate of California education, you need to do what you can to stop this train from running into schools. Then again, some choice proponents might argue that the union's power grab would do wonders to help the cause of vouchers. Hmmm, now there's a thought!



On Tests, Standards and More

- **Another Union Note:** Some argue that unions do represent their members. But that's rarely the case. One example from a recent election is illustrative. The Los Angeles "United Teachers" organization had to pick a new president this year. The winner was John Perez, who's already a union VP. Showing how little interest or connection there is between the teachers and their union, *Education Week* reported that "only ten percent of eligible members cast votes." Remember that when they speak on someone's behalf.

- **FCAT Blues:** "Thousands may have to repeat 4th grade," blared the *Orlando Sentinel* headline. Thirty percent of the fourth graders taking the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test failed, and since the legislature called for no promotion without passing, and although districts have some leeway in who stays and who goes, there will definitely be an impact on children who thought they were done with the 4th grade. We think it's awful that fourth graders would have to repeat, but we think it's more awful that 5th graders would be unprepared. For more details on FCAT scores, go to www.myfloridaeducation.com/sas/fcat/fcpress2.htm.

- **Doomed to Repeat Itself:** History learning in the nation is apparently an elite exercise, according to the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress. While slight gains were made among fourth and eighth graders from 1994's low achievement levels, more than **60 percent** of all test takers did not even reach basic levels of achievement. Proficiency is what is expected, meaning that students should be able to demonstrate competency over challenging subject matter and be able to use it in real-world situations. Sadly, in 4th, 8th and 12th grades only 18, 17 and 11 percent of children respectively scored at or above the proficient level. We won't jump on the 9/11 soapbox and argue that now more than ever it's critical that students have a deep and abiding grasp of history. (Well, maybe we'll take that soapbox, after all).

Tiny bits of good news were evident – the racial gaps narrowed slightly, but we cannot celebrate when basic skills are held by only 44 percent of fourth grade African-American students and 42 percent of Hispanic fourth graders. In twelfth grade that drops to 20 and 26 percent, respectively. Interestingly, there are twenty percent more

non-public school students than public school students scoring at or above the basic levels. But only 31 percent of non-public 8th grade students were proficient. That's a reflection – in our humble opinion – of the fact that the majority of private schools often have the same watered down books and programs that the public schools buy, despite a choice to do otherwise.

While alarming, the news shouldn't be a surprise (and if it is, you're not keeping up with the latest news!) A test given in 1999 to Ivy League seniors asking basic questions about our nation's history was flunked by nearly 80 percent of the test takers, and back in 1986 some of us will recall the horror of learning that only 40 percent of high school seniors actually knew the period in which the Civil War was fought. Apparently, from the looks of this year's NAEP scores, they don't know why either. Pity the nation that lets that happen to its youngsters.

Solutions: We offer the following recommendations to the bold educator or administrator, and hope you'll be daring enough to consider yourself part of the problem and find a solution that helps set us back on course:

Pearson Learning/Core Knowledge History and Geography: Thanks to the widely regarded E.D. Hirsch, here's a beautifully written and illustrated, in-depth and content-rich set of books that will transform learning in the early grades. A sampling of the books that are now offered and are available through www.pearsonlearning.com are:

K-2: *The War of 1812, Ancient Egypt, The Civil War, Exploring the West, Mexico Today, Mesopotamia, and From Colonies to Independence.* At higher levels, books are available on *Ancient China, Ancient Greece, Japan Today, Making the Constitution* and more.

3-6: *History and Geography Compendium, Native American Cultures and Conflicts, The Age of Exploration, The Renaissance, Westward Expansion Before and After the Civil War, and The Enlightenment and Christianity,* among others.

The American Textbook Council's Gil Sewall specializes in reviewing history texts (among others) to determine the breadth and depth of their content. Here are some of his top picks, in various grades:

A History of US, Oxford (a "hybrid" series, starting at grade five)
The Story of America, Holt Publishing (eighth grade and above)

And for 11th grade and above:

A History of the United States, Prentice Hall, authored by Daniel Boorstin
(former Librarian of Congress)

Pathways to the President, Prentice Hall, Cayton et. al.

Of course, there's no reason parents can't purchase these books on their own and do some catch-up at home. We'd like to see all parents devote themselves to taking their kids through history this summer. Let's show schools what our children can do if given the right resources from which to learn!

Tests, Standards and More (*continued*)

- **What's Wrong with Teacher Education?** One thing is evident in some correspondence published in *Education Week*, from the head of the Ohio Wesleyan University Education Department and a retired professor. The retired professor wrote to criticize the commentary of a teacher-to-be at Ohio Wesleyan, because the teacher candidate seemed more interested in making his students feel good than imparting content. To the contrary —the Education school dean argued back in a letter — the work this teacher candidate was doing is rooted in the exploration of the purpose of education. But we have to ask: Do prospective teachers really go to school to explore the purpose of education? As the Public Agenda foundation has unfortunately found out all too many times (see Page 7), the workings of teacher education colleges are woefully out of step with what the public expects of its educators. For our part, if someone wants to understand the purpose of education and the meaning of life, we think the philosophy department might be a better place for him, letting teachers learn a thing or two about the subjects they intend to teach.
- **Teacher Advancement:** There are some programs available that advance teachers by altering fundamentals, such as compensation based on skills and responsibilities, and job differentiation itself. The Teacher Advancement Program, for example, does that (www.mff.org). Then there are advanced certification programs, like the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, which are pursued individually by teachers and are supposed to strengthen their abilities. A recent study reveals that this course of action – which doesn't revamp the way teachers are hired, rewarded, etc. – has little impact on student achievement. The study by John E. Stone at East Tennessee State University looked at three years of data and found that none of the state's board certified teachers would gain a performance bonus under the state's latest incentive program. The Stone study prompted the Education Commission of the States to call for a review of National Board certification, citing concerns about how much money member states are paying to participate in this program. The National Board's response? Besides calling the study's observations "miniscule," President Betty Castor says that they are "pretty confident" about the correlation between achievement and board certification. That and two cents...
- **Like Greeks Bearing Gifts:** Former NC Governor James Hunt plans to train Governors about education at his new institute. He will be aided by former NYC Deputy Schools Chancellor Judith Rizzo. But doesn't training imply that the trainers have been successful in their posts? While Hunt and Rizzo both get points for having tried to do much, there's no correlation between their effort and student achievement in their respective jurisdictions. Hunt also supports things like National Board certification, and during his tenure, charters were on the outs. The new cadre of governors likely to join the nation's top executive corps this November needs to be wary of Greeks bearing gifts. (To the politically correct but perhaps not so historically astute, before you pick up that pen to write us, the phrase comes from the Spartans and Trojans of old, and is not a swipe to Greek-Americans, whom we love.)

• **Speaking of Certification:** "About 9 percent of New York City's 12,828 uncertified teachers have failed a basic exam required for certification at least four times. Close to 3,300 teachers have never taken the test," according to the *New York Times*. There's no question to us that they should be able to pass what is considered a low-level exam, but the real issue is not whether they can pass a test, but whether the certification received from passing such a test is an indicator of whether or not someone is even *qualified* to teach. New York policy dictates that starting in '03, only certified teachers can work in the schools. But New York City schools need something beyond more certified teachers — they need a system that puts bad administrators out to pasture, that closes bad schools when they fail, and that doesn't rely upon the city's public school employees union to dictate how they operate.

• **Mayor Bloomberg's Saga:** The honeymoon between NYC Mayor Michael Bloomberg and the United Federation of Teachers is over, and we think this makes a marvelous opportunity to do some real reforming of the system. The saga started with Bloomberg delaying his sign-off of the teacher contract that would increase salaries and help the city pay for new recruitment efforts. It seems to have crested when the Mayor said these choice words (which are correct, by the way):

*If the police damaged our children the way the education system did,
we'd go shoot the police commissioner.*

What does he base this on? Well the data shows that there has been virtually no change in achievement for NYC's public schools in over a decade. According to a study released by the Manhattan Institute, the graduation rate is only 50 percent, with blacks and Hispanics trailing the average at 44 percent and 39 percent graduating, respectively, and in the lower grades, barely a third of children pass the English and math exams in most districts.

In our expansive search of media reports and speeches, we found no references at all to this disaster by the head of the union, Randi Weingarten. Instead, we found HUNDREDS of references to the union contract, Bloomberg's failure to support it, lots of talk about strikes, etc. And if you think our words are mean and unfeeling, consider these out of Weingarten's mouth in regard to the Mayor:

"Rudy Guiliani's tactics of diversion, demonization and delay did nothing to alleviate the critical shortage of qualified teachers... Under Mayor Bloomberg the demonization seems to have stopped, but the division and delay have not."

How about the division and delay caused by the ill-managed and disorganized schools?

Waiting for the Supremes

Any day now, the U.S. Supreme Court will issue the long-anticipated decision in the case regarding the Cleveland, Ohio scholarship program. That program, as discussed before, supports about 4,000 poor children in their choice of a public or private school. But because the vast majority of choices made are private, opponents sued, arguing that the program thus endorses religion, and violates our tried and true separation of church and state. In reality, we know that parents choosing schools is not the same as government sponsoring religion, and we know that no matter which way the program was written, the opponents would still be just that. The issue of whether or not kids are allowed to choose schools out of the traditionally public-realm is a political one, not a legal one, but it's well and good that the Court should rule and put legal questions to rest.

We wait for a final decision that will either sanction the Cleveland program and all such programs, will sanction the program unique to Cleveland, or will strike it down on some condition, (or even do something altogether different that we cannot predict.) We're hopeful that for Cleveland's children, the High Court will rule in the affirmative, and then we can all get back to things that really matter, like making sure there are programs enough all over the country to help children no matter what their disadvantage gain access to the kind of education they deserve.

For the more studious among you, there's great reading this month in the Summer '02 publication of "*Education next.*" Go to www.educationnext.org to read up.

Looking to the Grassroots

Alive and well and making reform happen are a panoply of grassroots groups that often start at the kitchen table and, with the right issue and attitude, often make it to the state capitols where they influence policy. CER's Partners Program was launched last year to bring support and encouragement to these groups. Below are some of our newest partners, and what they are doing for education reform:

Hispanic Education, Inc. — Former public school teacher Joseph C'de Baca saw the plight of Denver area minority children and took to the streets to organize parents who wanted better for their children. More than 3,000 parents eventually joined his group, and is working to keep the idea of greater choices alive for parents.

Beginning with Children Foundation — Having started an alternative public school in one of Brooklyn's disadvantaged areas, the Beginning with Children Foundation sought more freedom and independence from conventional rules and launched a charter school program, which has given nearly 500 children a chance at a standards-based, high-achieving education.

Philadelphia Alliance for Charter Schools — Providing a voice and support base for Philly's charters and their large parent base, the Alliance has been the only thing standing in between the charters and those who would prefer to send them away. (See related story on Page 11)

On Charters

- *When a Law is not a Law:* Iowa passed a law that some call a charter school law last month. They thought it was pretty daring; we're not impressed. Here's why: Ten schools could become charters this year, but to do so they have to be started by public schools and overseen by the same school districts that manage the other schools. Even the Des Moines school district commented that "this is one of the most carefully defined and limited charter legislations [sic] in the country." That means, of course that it doesn't do spit to create charters. But the reason for the law wasn't to create charters, but to get more federal money. If the feds follow their own law governing the use of federal charter funds, they'll find this is a law they can't support.
- *When a Law is not a Law, Part II:* Tennessee lawmakers are on the verge of passing a bill that also would do little to spur real charter schools into existence. After months of study and inspection of the charter concept, the legislators asked the state Commissioner to come up with a bill that would be acceptable to all sides, including the state teachers union. It was that union that about a year ago we reported had issued a secret report that was not so secret when we got it, that throughout their analysis questioned the need to have any school not run like all the rest. Well, the Tennessee bill would have enabled failing schools to become charters in certain jurisdictions, with all current rules and regulations applying – including union contracts – unless waivers were sought. If you asked any one of the nation's 2,400 or so charter founders, what do you suppose their view toward having to navigate the waiver maze would be? So like its Midwest colleague, this one also looks like it may get a failing grade in our book.
- *Michigan's Woes:* A more complicated political mess you've not seen in a long time, but here's a story about how charter schools almost gave up their ability to operate independently of the state education bureaucracy in exchange for a handful of new schools. From the state board of education to the legislature, the Michigan Education Association has worked its magic in building a cadre of politicians that are completely owned, lock, stock and barrel, (as we used to say) by the opponents. When the legislature called for a review of charter schools, the Governor had a limited number of appointments. He chose a chairman, and charged him with getting support for raising the cap on charters. This guy also happened to believe that he needed unanimity to do so.

Over the ensuing months, this commission (on which there were some charter proponents), heard testimony, investigated reports about failing or financially unsound charters and in early May, issued their final report. While recommending that the cap be lifted by 25, the report essentially imposed a whole new set of layers and restrictions on charters. And in Detroit, new schools would be limited to two at-risk schools per year. The report also scolded Michigan authorizers for lax oversight. Michigan's charter woes pale in comparison to the successes, but this report wasn't about successes. In the end, the Commission chair got even the charter proponents to agree to support the recommendations, having reasoned that it was the best they could do for charters. The report was introduced as legislation, and to everyone's surprise it failed to muster enough union or other votes to get through. It may still rear its ugly head sometime in the future, but in the meantime, charters have a reprieve and can maybe now set about

the task of actually working to influence the legislators who's bread is buttered with their tax dollars. We'll see. To read what was in the report, go to CER's summary at www.edreform.com/charter_schools/micommission.htm. The state's charter group also commented. Go to MAPSA's website at www.charterschools.org

- *Choice in Michigan Among Public Schools* prompted 33,000 children to participate, which is clearly another reason why the Blob there is balking at any reform. In 1996, Michigan passed a law (as about 20 other states have today) allowing parents to choose a school in another district, depending on space and district preferences. Two thirds of school districts agreed to participate, and according to news reports, those 33,000 choices are causing school districts to think and act differently toward their customers, undertaking marketing and improvements that are often more substantive in nature. That's a win-win for everyone.

- *Trouble in Minnesota:* The Department of Children, Families and Learning (CFL) in Minnesota has decided to severely curtail the usefulness of the Federal Charter School Program Grant for that state's charter schools. Despite guidance from the U.S. Department of Education to the contrary, the CFL has told charters that grant money can't be used for most of the unavoidable start-up expenses that go with navigating the bureaucratic maze a school is asked to complete before it begins to serve students. The CFL's unnecessarily restrictive guidelines make it seem like the department isn't really focused on helping charter schools get off to healthy starts.

- *More about Minnesota:* A report issued by the Center for School Change at the University of Minnesota paints a dynamic picture of a vibrant set of choice programs, which together account for more than 30 percent of the state's population. Second chance programs, postsecondary enrollment options, choosing other public schools and charter schools didn't end up creaming or hurting poor kids, like many critics predicted. In fact, the critics themselves admit to the researchers that their predictions were wrong. For a copy or to read the report, call Joe Nathan at (612) 625-3506.

- *Florida Sunshine:* Charter schools in this state seem to get a lot more respect, and a lot more parity in funding. But it's causing the state's school board association to go haywire. Wayne Blanton, that group's director, was quoted by the press as saying that he may have to do something about that soon. "We're not opponents of charter schools, but if something keeps getting shoved down your throat without you having any say in it, it's difficult to be a strong supporter." Watch out, Florida!

- *National Charter School Conference:* It's probably not too late to inquire about this annual U.S. Department of Education event, which takes place from June 19-22 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. This year's event, normally attended by charter school operators, parents, community leaders and national experts, will also be attended by Secretary of Education Rod Paige and possibly President Bush. Panels are plentiful, plus — CER's first ever Charter School Marketplace will allow schools to interact with over 60 vendors of materials, curricula, services and equipment. For more information about the conference, go to www.conferencepros.com/conferences/charter/charter02/index.htm.

• *Strength in Numbers:* In 1995 there were approximately 230 charter schools. In the beginning of the 2000-2001 school year, there were 1,983. By the looks of CER's annual research and data gathering exercise, it appears likely that this coming school year, 2002-2003, the United States will have just under 3,000 charter schools! This number is astounding for several reasons: first, some states have reached their caps. Second, some states' laws are so weak that only a handful of schools are possible. Third, some states are experiencing unparalleled political attacks on charter schools that it's a miracle anyone would apply. Given these obstacles, there can be only one explanation for an addition of nearly 500 charter schools this fall: the power of freedom. When given the chance to start and choose schools free from current system constraints, people are willing to take risks and be courageous in their pursuits. Kudos to all those who took on the system and are winning!

Reality Check 2002

Public Agenda once again released an incredibly insightful report that puts to bed myths about how students view tests, and how schools view students. This annual survey found that students believe not only could they work harder, but they don't resent the tests that they are being made to take the way some testing opponents would have you believe.

The upper-middle class parents who eschew tests and are afraid Johnny is getting too stressed are, apparently, among the few. Eighty-two percent of middle and high school students say "academic expectations in their own schools are 'about right,' ...and 71 percent say the number of tests they get and the amount of homework" is about right, too.

Massachusetts illustrates the survey's findings. The administration of a high stakes test there — know as MCAS — was supposed to result in the downfall of civilization, as we know it. But as was the intention, students' scores are going up in response to raised expectations. "The percentage of students who passed the English section [of the MCAS][jumped from 66 percent to 82 percent between 2000 and 2002, and the percent of students who passed the math section rose from a dismal 55 percent to 75 percent," according to the *Boston Herald*.

Reinforcing previous reports that found most students do just enough to "get by," this Reality Check also found that "even as standards are being raised nationwide, many students say they could work harder in school, and many say classmates often get diplomas without having learned what was expected." Students said that if they thought it was "worth it," they'd devote more of their discretionary time to studying.

Do those ultimately responsible for teacher quality agree? Apparently not. While large number of employers and professors cite deficient basic skills in language arts and math among today's graduates, "just 19 percent of [education professors] said it was absolutely essential to produce teachers who 'stress correct spelling, grammar, and punctuation' for their students." So teachers teaching teachers would rather stress the self-directed learning than the acquisition of skills. Maybe that's another argument against traditional certification.

Chicken Little and Edison Schools

There is no small number of people wishing that former Pennsylvania Governor Tom Ridge hadn't moved to Washington. The Chicken Little atmosphere coloring the possible solutions to Philadelphia's educational failures couldn't be worse, and Ridge would have had the conviction to follow through. Instead, there's an absence of state leadership, coupled with an inane school reform commission, and in the crossfire is Edison schools.

Edison has its problems and deficiencies — like all of us, individuals and organizations alike. The company was on a pretty fast track to get a huge amount of business from the Philadelphia public schools. Now, predictions of doom and "I told you so-isms" are coming fast and furiously from critics, with an abundance of media coverage of both. One would think that businesses in America never falter and that education reform is normally embraced by the Blob.

Let's be clear about what is and isn't happening in Philadelphia: \$9,500 per child is educating less than fifty percent of children. Let's put that another way: 70 schools are so bad that the majority of children in those schools do not even have basic skills. Last year's tests found nearly 59 percent of students scoring in the bottom quartile on math and reading. Among African-Americans (are you sitting down?!) only NINE point SIX scored at or above basic in math.

The education malpractice, coupled with financial disaster prompted the state to exercise its legislatively sanctioned ability to take-over, and it appointed a commission to shake the place up. As anyone should have expected (even people without political know-how), the establishment and city fathers went nuts. One would think that such a negative response from the people most affected by school jobs would simply be looked upon as, well, selfish and narrow-minded. But instead of disregarding the opposition, the new school reform commission slowed the train down, so they could better "understand" what was happening and try to be more inclusive of the opposition. Never mind that for decades, the system has failed children. At the end of the day, the adult's feelings apparently mattered more than children's futures.

Today, the School Reform Commission (SRC) is wholly dependent on the very same school district staff that has presided over the failed system. Edison is only one of the casualties. Less public is the plight of Philadelphia's charter schools, who have lately been horsewhipped. Despite success among the majority, they've been pursued for bureaucratic paper work and told their budgets would be cut. The establishment is working its way through every avenue available, and all in the name of what? Local controls seems to be a common cry, but isn't it funny that the same school system that doesn't oppose taking state money opposes being displaced by the state.

It gets better. Not only has the Philadelphia mayor and education blob protested much, but Congressman Chaka Fattah has held hearings about these events. Fattah has also asked the Government Accounting Office to investigate the private companies who would likely be working in Philadelphia. That's an interesting thing to do with

taxpayer money. It's no secret that Fattah has been talked about as opposing any reforms that might shake up the system. But to use his role as a Congressman (with no jurisdiction over local affairs) to get the GAO on the case is utterly indefensible.

So back to Edison. Interest groups know that publicly traded companies are volatile to controversy. The examples of interest groups boycotting everything from orange juice to energy are legion. But they can't boycott a company that they can't directly purchase from, so instead, their job is to make their product seem so unbelievably controversial that anyone would be out of their mind to invest in its producer. Perception is everything on Wall Street. So Edison's stock began to dive rapidly, to nearly one dollar from a high of 38 not too long ago. The media starts writing and predicting its demise, the critics start saying I-told-you-so, the schools with contracts get nervous, and we have today a still viable company with a good product that the public now has "reason" to question.

We're confident that Edison isn't going anywhere anytime soon. They succeeded in getting financing they needed, and hopefully, they've learned a lot in the process about what happens when big-city fathers get in the way of attempts to help kids. But this is a precursor of what is yet to come if reformers don't stand up and demand the kind of change that, obviously, not all political leaders can handle.



It's the end of the school year for most parents, particularly those of us fortunate enough to have our children in schools that address their needs and give them a great education. But the summer won't be filled with all fun and frolicking for the children without basic skills, or the children whose communities are so ravaged that year-round education is the only positive part of their lives.

We'd love to end the school year on a happy note, but the reality is there are too many children for whom the political struggles outlined in this *Monthly Letter* are a reality. For us, that reality — and the reality of irresponsible leadership — is unacceptable. It's time to shake it all up. The summer is a great time to start.


Jeanne Allen