

THE Center for Education Reform



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

Happy New Year! Welcome back to the *Occasional Letter to Friends* that we pen a few times a year, to communicate the old way (on paper!) what it is we need you to know to make education reform — the imperative to success — a reality for everyone in America.

As we ring in 2011, there's no question: this can be the year for REAL change. That's because the **elections of 2010 were by far and away the best single "event" in the cause for meaningful education reform in more than a decade.** That's not a statement about anyone's politics — we are talking about state hall after state hall where new governors are taking over who are serious about reform. Check out the first "article" to get a better sense of what we're talking about.

Whether you are a school leader or aspire to be one, are funding people who create schools or are an equally important ally and observer, grab a coffee (or a cocktail) and read on to learn what it is 2011 has in store for you. We invite your active participation.



Who Let the Goves Out? (Who, Who?)

Watching and monitoring the governors' and other state races through our innovative **EducationFifty.com** initiative, we witnessed a seismic shift in legislatures and governor's mansions across the country as voters elected lawmakers who overwhelmingly favor education reform! Consider that, of the 37 gubernatorial races:

- 61 percent of the newly-elected governors support charter schools and strong charter laws;
- 39 percent are in favor of additional, comprehensive school choices for parents; and
- 44 percent want to see real performance pay and evaluations — not just bonuses — for our teachers.

With a solid base of support from advocates, activists and policymakers, this next group of governors has a once-in-a-generation opportunity to transform the education reform movement into a truly mass movement that reaches heights very few could have imagined.

• **The Newbies. Florida's** Rick Scott campaigned on a platform that supported charters, virtual schools, homeschooling, big changes to teacher tenure and the growth of vouchers extended to a greater number of families. And he's delivering on that promise by not watering down his plans post-election. In fact, he's already put former DC Schools Chancellor Michelle Rhee on his transition team. This guy means business.

• Taking a cue from former Florida Governor Jeb Bush, **PA's** new Governor Tom Corbett proposes offering families trapped in failing schools the opportunity to go elsewhere. This, along with the possibility of a new scholarship program, the expansion of Pennsylvania's model tax credit scholarship program and a strengthened charter school law, make Pennsylvania one to watch come this year...



- **New Mexico's** new governor, Susana Martinez, just appointed Hanna Skandera, a veteran reformer and former staffer to Governor Jeb Bush, as state schools chief.
- In addition to Hanna, reform-minded school chiefs are growing like weeds! Chris Cerf served under Chancellor Joel Klein in NYC and was on the ground floor of Edison Schools' success; he joins **NJ** Gov Chris Christie as Commissioner. Gov Corbett has picked reformer and former Ridge Ed Secretary Charles Zogby as his budget secretary.
- **Michigan's** Rick Snyder is relatively new to politics, having been both CEO of Gateway Computers and a venture capitalist. He is calling upon state leaders to tackle the teacher quality problem, raise standards and spend funds more efficiently while focusing on student achievement.
- **Nevada's** Brian Sandoval, Nikki Haley of the **Palmetto State**, **Oklahoma's** Mary Fallin and Scott Walker of the **Badger State** have all served as state legislators, and have honorable records in putting the needs of kids and families way above the interests of the Blob.
- Then there's former US Senator Sam Brownback, who was a supporter before it was cool, who will now tackle reform as Governor of **Kansas**. He led hearings on DC's education system leading up to Congress' adoption of its strong charter law. Former **Ohio** Congressman John Kasich is ready to take on his state's challenges with a clear view of what Washington can and can't do.
- Jerry Brown is back as **CA's** Governor; and though he once demonstrated some proclivity for reform, it appears the union support that ensured his win over eBay's Meg Whitman is paying off for the Blob. "Governor Moonbeam's" first education action was to replace seven ed reformers on the state board of education with some less choice-friendly folks and a union rep or two. Former state super turned winemaker Bill Honig is on there now as is Stanford's Michael Kirst; both smart for sure, but hardly china-breakers.
- **The Veterans (sort of)**. Mitch Daniels didn't have to go through a year of campaigning, so his new education plans have real workhorse momentum behind them. Tying teacher pay to their performance in the classroom is one on which both he and school superintendent Tony Bennett have been focused for months. The real gem, however, is a proposal for a statewide voucher program, allowing kids to attend their choice of schools. When questioned on the difficulty of getting a voucher plan approved, Daniels shot back, "The fact that it's complicated cannot be an excuse for inaction that fails our children." Stay tuned...
- With all due respect to our friends in the Garden State who confuse his tough talk with disrespect, **New Jersey's** Chris Christie is an education warrior. With taxes, budget deficits and the shenanigans of the cast of "Jersey Shore," it's heartening to see how he has kept education front and center. From his first press conference as governor to a rousing speech at the Excellence in Action National Summit, Christie has gone toe-to-toe with the teachers union, school boards and state legislators who would see the Garden State's education continue down a road of failure. Look for work on a stronger charter law, opportunity scholarships, real tenure reform and virtual options for families to help turn the ship around.

Solving the Capital Problem.

It's not just the financial capital markets that remain messy in 2011. Our human capital challenge is growing. Despite an increased teacher candidate pool, the caliber of that force is uneven and union contracts advance and protect the high and low achievers alike. With more and more young people turning to teaching in a volatile economy, there's never been a more compelling reason to implement new measures to safeguard the quality of teaching in the US and expand the delivery through which it's offered.

Could 2011 finally be the year when the public recognizes the roles seniority, tenure and other work rules have played in deflating student achievement? Let's be honest — the problems brought on by union control of schools so artfully embodied in *Waiting for Superman* is not just a pox in inner city schools, it's a pox in all of our houses. Consider:

On Tenure: "The tiny number of tenure cases filed in **New Jersey** is no secret: only 33 cases against schoolteachers last year, 42 the year before, 35 the year before that. Out of more than 100,000 schoolteachers statewide, 110 cases over three years is miniscule... The superintendent of Orange schools outlined four cases in his district, one of a teacher who allegedly fought with another teacher and student, used expletives and a racial epithet, and showed other inappropriate conduct in class.

'Over a five-year period, while the employee engaged in the aforementioned, the employee was on a paid suspension for 563 days,' said superintendent Ronald Lee. 'The tenure charges resulted in [the judge] suspending the employee without pay for 30 days.'

It's not just protecting teachers, either; but administrators, too. The superintendent of South Orange/Maplewood schools said tenure protection for principals and other leadership positions leave superintendents with little discretion over their own senior staff." (*NJ Spotlight*, December, 2010)

On Paying More for Education, Not Performance: According to research out of the University of Washington, forty-eight percent of teachers have master's degrees and get paid more for it, despite evidence that there's no connection between quality teachers and a master's. The evidence dating back to the 90s suggests that there's no correlation to achievement. Says Bill Gates, "My own state of Washington has an average salary bump of nearly \$11,000 for a master's degree — and more than half of our teachers get it. That's more than \$300 million every year that doesn't help kids." Stanford University Economist Eric Hanushek estimates that master's degrees for teaching net higher education well over \$8 billion in revenues annually. Maybe that's another dragon that needs to be slain.

On Seniority: Central Falls, RI's plight shows what happens when seniority gets put ahead of the interests of students. First, a courageous schools superintendent by the name of Fran Gallo used a new federal law to fire the entire staff after the union refused to be a partner in changing school culture where only seven percent of 11th graders were proficient in math, to name just one horrific score. After making national news, the union said it would compromise, by spending more hours in the school and eating lunch with their students. But after getting their jobs back, teachers decided to rebel. They amassed 224 absences or sick days in just the first few weeks of school. It's no wonder that 15 percent of the student body is truant when the same average percentage of their faculty are out each day as well. Teachers teach, but they are also role models. What keeps the worst offenders in the classroom? Seniority.



Real substantive contract reform is the only out. For more than twenty years, the notion of paying teachers more money if they are effective in the classroom has been an issue that has resonated with citizens and policymakers alike. But endorsing merit pay, as it was once called, has often been met with fierce criticism by both the media and by education interest groups. Today that is changing. Thanks to increased attention to the importance of teachers on a student's progress — no matter what their background — performance pay is gaining ground as a critical policy lever to improve schools and to ensure the proliferation of great teaching far into the future. Even though "performance pay" has gained support, the concept itself remains the single most misunderstood issue in education reform today. To this end, CER offers *Making the Grade? A Report Card on Performance Pay Programs Across the US* available at www.edreform.com.

Want to really solve the capital problem? Welcome to...

The Digital Decade. Virtual? Online? Cyber? It used to be that such words only applied to the new commerce we all indulge in across the Internet. Not anymore. A growing new sector of education has opened up new learning opportunities to approximately 1.5 million school kids in 39 states. Not only is online learning growing at leaps and bounds, but an unprecedented agreement among educators, industry leaders, reformers and business people resulted in a path breaking new endeavor called the Digital Learning Council whose "Ten Elements of High Quality Digital Learning" are aimed at transforming education for the next generation of America's students through the use of technology.

We're Not Making This Up! Advocates for Children — such a warm and fuzzy name for an organization. It conjures up images of crusading parents and community leaders fighting for their kids, standing up to the status quo. In reality, the group just put a halt to the education of 125 low-income girls in **NYC** for a month after successfully barring Girls Prep, an expanding high-performing charter school, from using unused classroom space in a traditional public school. The school, which specializes in educating children with autism, had six classrooms available for Girls Prep's expansion into a new grade level, but Advocates for Children used the school's specialized nature as an excuse to block Girls Prep, saying that it would be a disruption. Now that education space is being used for storage, and Girls Prep has been forced to spend \$700,000 to renovate private space. As for the so-called disruptive nature of two schools sharing the traditional space? "No child would have been displaced, and no child was displaced," said P.S. 98 school principal Ronnie Shuster adding, "when they were in the building, Girls Prep middle-school girls had been proving to be an asset to the autistic children. Their kids learned to support our kids."



Choice Matters!

With a veritable sweep of the state legislature this year, **North Carolina** families may have the chance to make some hard choices for their kids in coming years. Like the choice of where to send their kids to school or determining the best educational fit for their children. That's not a luxury enjoyed by many, and certainly not in the Tar Heel State where legislators have capped the number of charter schools at 100 for years — a cap reached long ago. But, the legislative sea change brings with it strong support not only for more charters, but other choices as well. Let's hope the general attitude of legislators matches that of incoming Representative Jeff Collins, who positioned the current state of schools in terms we can all understand, saying, "If I had a monopoly with a company that makes horse shoes, there would be no motivation to make the best quality-horse shoe."

Unlike North Carolina, **Milwaukee, WI** has an abundance of school choices for parents and teachers — charters, vouchers and open-enrollment traditional schools, for starters — and parents are voting with their feet in droves. Only a fraction more than 65 percent of students attend their assigned traditional Milwaukee public school, while almost 21,000 kids choose vouchers and thousands more attend charter schools. Marquette's Alan Borsuk sums the situation up nicely when he writes, "Grasping where kids are going to school is a key to understanding the education scene in Milwaukee — in fact, in the metro area, given the impact of the more than 8,000 children from the city enrolled in suburban public schools. See where kids are going and you see a lot about what parents want, how school finances are being shaped, and even what is going on in classrooms in many schools."

You'd think that 1,600 pages of meticulously crafted curriculum, staffing, school philosophy and financial planning would at least give a prospective charter school a fighting chance. Not in **Frederick County, MD**. Being well prepared just means that the education establishment will sharpen their swords even more to see that you are not approved to enter "their space." Last fall, the County's School Board

unanimously voted to block the creation of the Frederick Classical Charter School, a school that would have offered kids there a real alternative and a classically based education. Though opposition heaped praise on the proposal, they did so as they cemented their arguments against it. And they did it just because: because they felt threatened, because they were working in their own best interest, and because they could. Maryland's charter law is so weak (it has earned a 'D' in CER's latest rankings) that only an overhaul will suffice.

Colorado's Douglas County School District is making waves with its outspoken desire to offer families as many school choices as possible. They have already pushed for charter schools and virtual schooling options. "If it's a new idea, an innovative idea, we are going to explore and consider it," says John Carson, school board president. Now the school board is considering providing parents with a voucher, called an Option Certificate Program, allowing them to send their kids to the school of their choice — public, private or parochial. "It's really interesting and instructive that a community like Douglas County is looking at this because they are saying, '...No one school type is going to monolithically, exactly fit every child,'" says Alex Cranberg, founder of the Alliance for Choice in Education. Douglas County could teach many other school districts an important lesson in exploring all options so that all kids have a chance to succeed in a school environment that best suits their needs.

And with new leadership in state houses and governor's mansions around the country, new choices for parents could be just around the corner: **Indiana, Florida, Utah, New Jersey, Pennsylvania,** and others are all working to form new, or expand existing, school choice programs for families in their states. Others are more quiet in their school choice plans, but keep an eye out for many more voucher, opportunity scholarship and tax credit proposals when legislative sessions are in full swing this year.

5,453. That's the number of charter schools open in 40 states and the District of Columbia, according to CER's annual fall analysis of all the schools approved and operating as of the beginning of the 2010 school year. That means 465 more innovative schools of choice than last year — roughly nine percent more — educating more than 1.7 million kids. Charters are outperforming their traditional public school neighbors all over the country, and yet it is still a hardscrabble fight to bring new options to parents and new opportunities to students in many parts of the country. Several states added a grand total of zero charter options this school year, and it is no surprise that their laws are some of the most restrictive in the nation.

A decision by the U.S. Supreme Court on the constitutionality of the **Arizona** tax-credit program allowing parents to determine where their kids go to school is imminent. The program has been upheld in Arizona's State Supreme Court, as well as in federal court, but the ACLU found a friend in California's historically radical 9th Circuit Court of Appeals and the program was shut down. Their "concern?" That government dollars were breaking the separation of church and state. But it's parents who should decide where the money follows their child, and the U.S. Supreme Court has traditionally come down on the side of private choice NOT being unconstitutional. And as IJ's Tim Keller points out, "Private choice is the defining characteristic of Arizona's tax credit program." Where the money and child go is the private decision of parents, based on the needs of their child. Proponents say the November 2010 arguments went well.

Thanks to Students First PAC, **Pennsylvania** lawmakers are poised for an expansion of varied choice programs. Run by Chairman Joe Watkins, the relatively new grassroots group shows that politically active citizens can indeed help elect reform minded lawmakers. A conference in September brought candidates, policy leaders and the community members together to discuss the issues facing education in the Keystone State, and a result was a competitive election where both candidates embraced full school choice, and voters were aware of the issues at a level not before seen.

StudentsFirst Redux. They say imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. As Michelle Rhee finished up an amazing success story in turning around an establishment-dominated school system, she launched a new effort by this name aimed at building a national movement focused on the interests of children in our public education system, rewarding great teachers based on their work in the classroom, putting education money where it belongs and providing strong school choices to parents. (Why didn't we think of that?)

Don't forget **National School Choice Week** — the first annual! — starting January 23rd. For information on how you can get involved, go to www.schoolchoiceweek.com.

What Have We Been Up To?

For our part, CER spent 2010 paving the way for major progress in 2011. Call us optimistic, but we were right to build the platforms that will help accelerate the pace of reform through the US. Our evolution over 17 years has provided consistency in vision and an uncompromising voice for change, no matter who is talking. We made that vision clear in the opening days of 2009, when we introduced the new president and the 111th Congress to a bold vision for the new government. *Mandate for Change* hosted prominent, diverse voices to proclaim — before it was popular — that we must pursue the four pillars of reform through federal accountability, charter schools, school choice and improvements in teacher quality to enhance the workforce of our future, help rebuild the infrastructure of the present and seek to wipe out the civil rights injustices of the recent past.

Changing Laws. We subsequently launched an aggressive outreach effort to federal lawmakers and communicated with dozens over the ensuing months about how to implement these ideas, how to assess reform impact, and how to wield the federal carrot and stick to ensure that children, rather than adults and systems, benefit from education policy.

- CER **analysis** and critique of the impact of the Stimulus Bill on real educational results shaped public perception — and armed lawmakers with needed defenses. We changed the landscape for 'Race to the Top,' such that our pillars remained — albeit watered down — critical components of final regulations.
- As the campaigns around the country heated up, we engaged the grassroots. Our **EducationFifty.com** portal ranked and tracked the gubernatorial candidates on their views of education reform, causing them to try to out do each other on their reform pedigree and giving voters a place to learn the real, inside scoop on where the candidates stood on education reform. Today we begin tracking their performance against their promises as part of our larger EdReform Election Center program.
- **Toolkits**, specialized state plans and more were implemented and employed to lay policy groundwork in states where charter laws are lacking or non-existent. Those include **Chicago, Florida, Kentucky, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania** and **South Carolina** to name some highlights. In each we have specific accomplishments and are happy to share in more detail. Similarly, many grassroots leaders in some of the final ten states without charter school laws launched their local issues campaigns with our guidance.
- CER has dramatically improved its capacity to reach every state lawmaker (about 8,000 in all) in the country this past year. In total, CER's team traveled to or significantly engaged in legislative activity in 33 states and the District of Columbia.
- **Research and Education:** The Center for Education Reform is the nation's leading source of education research housing over 11,300 reports, polls and scholarly articles, of which abstracts and data are culled regularly to promote the issues.



Changing Minds: The most visible of all our activities, CER's communications program works rapidly to deploy data, research and analysis to work to advance reform throughout the media. In the first eleven months of 2010, CER reached more than 100 million people in traditional media and another estimated 10 million in the blogsphere. More highlights worth noting:

- Major media outlets which undertook stories at our prompting include the *Wall Street Journal*, the Associated Press and the *Washington Post* (among many others) on 'Race to the Top,' and the FOX Business Channel's *Stossel* on the DC teachers union's contract negotiations.
- Influential "hits" included several appearances each in/on the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Washington Post*, FOX News and NPR, opinion pieces on education leadership (*Detroit Free Press*), Atlanta's cheating scandal (*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*) and the charter school struggle in Maryland (*Washington Post*), and analysis for the NBC Nightly News, CNN, the Oprah Radio Network and BBC Radio.
- CER's active social media presence has drawn new supporters and fans, who repeat and post the messages we deliver on CER's Twitter accounts — @JeanneAllen and @edreform.
- In all, CER has issued 72 press releases, authored 178 posts and news digests through our blog Edspresso, and actively participated on both *Politico's* Arena and the *National Journal's* blogs.

Changing Cultures: An active citizenry, vigilant in the pursuit and defense of freedom, is our best weapon against failure. Thus, CER engages ordinary people to become activists, cultivating, growing and nurturing grassroots to take on the lawmakers, influence the media and engage parents in the fight for reform.

- "On Purpose." Former senior fellow Samuel Casey Carter (the "No Excuses" originator) was commissioned to give life to our mutual belief that great schools need not just strong academics but strong characters to truly produce great students. Published fall of 2010 by Corwin Press and supported by the staff at CER, "On Purpose." describes 12 exemplars of strong culture.
- Across the country, Catholic schools are struggling with declining enrollments, increased costs for both parents and schools and changing demographics. CER has been engaged in several efforts to ensure the permanence of Catholic education as viable quality school choices. Our *Catholic Schools Blueprint* draws on our expertise and knowledge of school management to develop a more sustainable solution for this important resource.

And Now for Our BIG News...

- The **Media Bullpen** is setting out to change the way the media covers education reform. Information is power and the media impacts education like no other issue, so we're holding everyone to the same standard — get your facts straight and tell the whole story. Every day we'll respond to the day's education news from around the country. Debuting this winter, The Media Bullpen will:
 - Debunk popularly held misconceptions about education with authority and expertise;
 - Show how the media is doing on a daily basis in their coverage of education through tools like the Media Scoreboard;
 - Provide must-have information for journalists and policymakers;
 - Serve as a critical springboard for legislative action; and
 - Readers will be able to see education stories for a particular region or state.

Still in launch phase. Check out www.mediabullpen.com for frequent updates.

• CER is launching it's own "Reform School," an unprecedented effort to ensure that our future reformers know the history of reform, lest they be doomed to repeat it. **Education Reform University** will train the next generation of policymakers and activists. The single largest impediment to real, lasting reform — even beyond the teachers unions — is the lack of common knowledge needed to take first and next steps in policymaking. We hold in our storehouses of data and memory banks access to all of the history and lessons of the movement dating back to the 80s. We piloted our first foray into "higher" education for reformers in December by giving policymakers a crash course on education reform. Over the following months, more coursework will be delivered in person and online to groups of reformers, activists, charter networks, and even teachers. Eventually we foresee a degree program, in reform.

We Couldn't Do It Without You!

We'd like to give a shout out to a few of our new supporters — Robert Carroll, Joel Greenberg, Steven Hart, Anthony Meyer, Jay Regan and Stephen and Amy Sills — whose generous contributions in 2010 make our important work possible.

And a big HIGH FIVE to our dedicated fans, many of who have been supporting CER's mission since the early 90s, like: Frank Baxter, Aldo Bernardo, Bob and Lindy Devereux, Philip Dietrich, John Field, Arthur Fitzner, Maureen Foulke, John Hansel, Doris Hendricks, Judith Jones, Floyd Kvamme, Robert Lattimer, Greg and Pam Miller, Owen and Diane Moen, Gene Nicholson, Maureen Quirk, Geoffrey Rosenberger, John Stambaugh and Edward and Marilyn Stewart... to name only a few!

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And now for a very important commercial:

Are you one of the millions who went through economic distress last year? Are you looking for a way out? Now, a new product that can transform the economy: It's called **education reform**, and it's guaranteed to produce a better educated populace that is ready to compete to make America supreme once again. Just support CER with a modest \$100 donation (or more if you didn't go through economic distress last year) and we'll send you immediately your own copy of "On Purpose," the new path breaking book on building great school cultures, co-published by CER. Act now. Supplies are limited. Operators are standing by. 😊

Thank you. And may you have a healthy, happy and prosperous 2011!


Jeanne Allen