

FOR TWENTY-TWO YEARS,
MAKING ALL SCHOOLS WORK BETTER FOR ALL CHILDREN.



2015 PROGRESS REPORT

WHERE WE'VE BEEN

the
CENTER FOR EDUCATION REFORM



A BALANCED APPROACH TO ADVOCACY AND SUPPORT (OUR SERVICES)

The Center for Education Reform (CER) is the pioneer and leading voice for substantive and structural education reform in the US. Often considered the standard bearer of policy, ideas and innovation by the people on the frontlines of education around the country, CER has been – for twenty-two years – consistently dedicated to creating and improving educational opportunities and excellence through actions that make a difference long after news and election cycles have ended.

Working with leaders at the state and local level, our team of committed experts helps to cultivate and secure lasting changes to laws by providing a wealth of talent and resources including:

- Market analysis to help external organizations engage collaboratively
- Access for key partners and allies to one another and CER's extensive network
- Leading proprietary research and publications to aid stakeholders
- Sharing of best practices and tactics throughout the reform community
- Strategic support and reinforcement of local, state and national efforts
- Detailed campaign planning and coordination for targeted efforts
- Media relations and message development for all constituents
- Coalition building and grassroots support in communities nationwide
- Legislative outreach and policy development

We are connected to education leadership at the state and local level across the country, and our commitment is to provide support and reinforcement in partnerships and relationships, rather than direction from thirty thousand feet.

A MULTI-PRONGED APPROACH TO PROTECTING STRUCTURAL AND SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE

The Center for Education Reform has been the pioneer organization in the field of education reform. Over the years we have played a critical role in raising awareness and interest to the point that education is a critical issue in every major election.

HOW WE'RE DIFFERENT:

- National credibility and connections, local relationships and impact
- Delivering results in the halls of power and in the halls of local schools
- Focus on structure and substance more than people and politics
- Defender of facts, accuracy and accountability in debate, measurement, and media coverage
- Clearinghouse for innovation in policy, implementation and measurement
- The most experienced leaders in education reform
- Servant leadership model allows us to reinforce local initiatives rather than dominate them

MAKING SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE WITH POLICY & RESEARCH

Among CER's numerous publications, reports and research tools, **Charter School Laws Across the States - Rankings and Scorecard**, is in the **Top 10** most viewed charter documents of all time. The Center's flagship publication has informed and influenced the nation's leading charter school laws, **and is consistently ranked the highest viewed content on Edreform.com.**

The law rankings have time and time again predicted the effectiveness of charter policies in the states, demonstrating that strong laws yield strong charter environments that produce high-quantity and high-quality schools with strong accountability, while weak laws that rest control in traditional state bureaucracies (often enacted as compromises to teachers unions and the education establishment) are wrought with problems.

Leading university researchers and analysts rely on CER's credibility and data to guide their thinking. The following are those who just over the past 18 months have personally contacted us to request our assistance in providing longitudinal research and data we have developed:

- American University
- Boston University
- Columbia University
- George Washington University
- Harvard University
- Haverford College
- Michigan State University
- New York University
- Stanford University
- University of Georgia
- University of Pennsylvania
- University of Southern California
- University of Chicago
- American Federation of Children
- Americans for Tax Reform
- Archdiocese of Chicago
- Bi-partisan Policy Center
- Black Alliance of Educational Options
- Boston Consulting Group
- Capital Impact Partners
- Education Industry Association
- Institute for Better Education
- Parents Empowered
- Students Transforming Education
- Victory 4 All (Africa)

AND IN STATE HALLS AND ON CAPITOL HILL

CER's expertise in reading and analyzing legislation for hidden and often unintended consequences of law is well known, sending scores of legislative analysts, staffs and Members of Congress to the Center for its team's review and input on numerous policy proposals, as well as help in assuring their success.

That's why North Carolina State Representative Rob Bryan called the Center and invited its participation in the evolution of the state's charter school amendments, its new school choice program for poor children and most recently, his proposal to create an Achievement School District. In addition to their ongoing input and advice at the capitol, CER convened its numerous, long-time allies at the grassroots level to support the school choice leaders' efforts and help them arrive at relatively successful outcomes last year.

When Maryland's new governor signaled his willingness to finally revisit the state's weak charter school law, CER's founder Jeanne Allen and then-president Kara Kerwin engaged with the state's leadership to provide critical input to the policy development and proceedings. Sadly, the result was actually a rollback of policy, but the Center represented the views of thousands of citizens, many of whom remain active in encouraging improvements for the future.

As Michigan's charter schools were being attacked by some media outlets that relied on the public school monopoly for their data and understanding, the Center was called upon to help respond with its keen insights, credibility and tools. It produced a point-by-point response that was delivered to all media outlets and all legislators, reducing the impact of a negative bias, which might have otherwise caused legislators to believe the report. CER's credibility helped counteract the anxiety of legislators, who then learned that the truth was far more compelling.

When the **Voucher Laws Across the States-Rankings and Scorecard** gave Louisiana only a “C” grade, the Governor personally asked his staff to contact the Center. While expressing frustration, they solicited our recommendations for improvement. In addition, we quietly reached out to numerous private school leaders and supporters to engage them in fruitful policy discussions about what might make them expand to the state to provide new quality choice seats for kids. The result was several new schools agreeing to open in the Bayou in 2016.

Rob Birdsell of the Drexel Fund wrote and acknowledged the role we played. It is vital, he said, **“to have partners like CER to introduce us to prospective private schools to replicate, to donors that have a like minded vision, and to work collaboratively to advance school choice”** in Louisiana.

Florida school leaders and legislators continue to look to the Center for its expertise in how to battle fiscal inequity, oppositional school boards, and public apathy. Collaborations with charter leaders there, and hard work with numerous civic and educational institutions throughout the state have CER poised once again to lead the development of a new charter law that would provide not only equity but alternative authorizing structures, which are sorely needed.

Having worked with ALEC and their new leadership over the years, Jeanne, in her senior fellow capacity, was invited to work on ways both organizations together might more strategically engage new lawmakers in creating the best parent choice laws. That led the leadership to the annual meeting, where CER’s long-time experience proved invaluable. **“Without you we may have found ourselves in a deadlock. I think its proof positive how important it is to have CER at the table at all times,”** said ALEC’s Education Director.

Whenever CER is at the table, real education reform is protected and advanced. Across the US, from TN to OH to its backyard of Washington, DC, the Center is called in for advice and support because its expertise and willingness to confront both opponents as well as friends who occasionally go off-kilter is well known. Community by community and state by state, its strategy prowess and strong voice are unparalleled.

MAKING HEADLINES WITH MEDIA AND PUBLIC RELATIONS EFFORTS

The Center is often complemented for its ability to quickly, and with clear messaging, hit the important issues surrounding education reform in the press, both through print, broadcast and social media. Indeed, CER messages and citations reach over 60 million individuals through traditional news sources annually, with over 500 news and broadcast pieces featuring one of the Center’s spokespeople.

Less well-known are the numerous times that the Center has offered – or been asked – to ghost write letters, editorials or even press releases for colleagues, allies, state leaders or even legislators. Here are just a few selections:

Parent Choice IS “Innovative”, *The Sun Sentinel*, Honorable Jim Horne, former FL Commissioner of Education

Celebrating School Choice, *The Wake Weekly*, Bob Luddy, CEO of Captive Air and founder of Thales Academies

School Choice in the District of Columbia, *DC Examiner*, Donald Hense, Chairman of Friendship Public Charter schools and CER Board Member

Parents Want and Need More Choice, *The Tampa Tribune*, Frank Biden

Parents Must Actively Protect our Kids Education, *The Orange County Register*, Julie Collier, California grassroots leader

MAKING PARENTS POWERFUL ADVOCATES FOR REFORM

The Center for Education Reform has nearly two decades under its belt working to empower parents. From helping parents who feel treated like they are “just” a mom or dad to engage forcefully with their schools, to advising and supporting their development of education reform policies that give them more power, the Center is unique among all national organizations in having an ever-present focus on parents, their local needs, and their concerns.

We started with **The School Reform Handbook** in 1995, which trained an army of parents to bring the nation its first (and still best!) charter school laws and state standards. Then in 1999, CER began issuing a quarterly publication and a training program entitled **Parent Power!** a program aimed at helping parents make sense of schooling. That included working with parents whose children were on numerous charter school waiting lists to ensure the creation of more choices to meet their demands.

When the World Wide Web grew, so did **Parent Power!** such that today, CER is credited with supporting and developing over 10,000 grassroots groups all across the country.

As new programs were created and afforded parents more power, the Center began cataloguing the myriad ways that parents can not only exercise their rights, but influence the course of legislative action and engage more people to grow results-focused programs – and data sources – to help kids succeed. Thus the **Parent Power Index** was born, ushering in a new vision for a new generation of parents! The **Parent Power Index** gives parents an interactive tool to discover whether their state affords them the power – and if not, what they can do to get it.

“As a parent, would you rather raise your kids in a state known for its iconic skyline, or a state that has become an education icon? Parents in New York have to make that choice.”

“The Center for Education Reform has released a report about school systems in all 50 states called **The Parent Power Index (PPI)**. The index allows parents to see where their state ranks in terms of educational choice, transparency, and teacher quality. The report ranks New York at 18th place. The position could be worse, but it could also be better.”
The Watchdog, 6.15.15

“As a Parent in Montana, this index reflects how little control parents with students in Pub School have.” - Montana parent on Twitter

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

“It’s not surprising that teachers that work at charter schools would not want to join a union,”
said Alison Zgainer,
executive vice president
of the Center for
Education Reform, a pro-
charter organization in
Washington, D.C. “They
want more autonomy in
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MAKING WAVES

“CER is the best port of call for any of us sailing the seas of school reform. Add harbor master to your resume!” Florida edreform pioneer



ON UNIONS

“It’s not surprising that teachers that work at charter schools would not want to join a union,” said Alison Zgainer, executive vice president of the Center for Education Reform, a pro-charter organization in Washington, DC “They want more autonomy in the classroom, and being part of a union you lose that autonomy.” *Wall Street Journal*, 11.17.15

WHEN POLITICIANS MISSPEAK

“That is absolutely false,” Jeanne Allen, the founder of the Center for Education Reform, said of Clinton’s claims about charters. “She sounds like an aloof, elite candidate from a bygone era, before ed reform was a reality.” *Washington Post*, 11.11.15

WHEN COMMUNITIES FAIL KIDS

“As a multi-generational Marylander, the state is in my heart and soul, and I want nothing more than for all of its citizens to thrive. My purpose has been in education and entrepreneurship; I work to make a difference for the millennials and grow the region’s startup community, particularly in education technology. It is unbelievable to me that we are unable to pass simple, fair, wholly emancipated charter school legislation that will allow more opportunities for more kids.” - Former Board Chair Frank Bonsal, *Baltimore Sun* 8.30.15

WHEN LAWMAKERS DISAPPOINT CITIZENS

A national charter advocacy organization wants Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan (R) to veto a bill passed by the General Assembly that would change how charter schools operate in the state.

The bill originally was pushed by charter advocates because it would have given charter operators greater authority and was a way to increase the number of such schools in the state. But it was significantly watered down as it made its way through the legislature.

Kara Kerwin, president of the Center for Education Reform, sent a letter to Hogan last week asking him not to sign the bill.

“The Public Charter School Improvement Act of 2015, no longer reflects the bold change your original proposal envisioned and will do nothing to improve the state’s already ‘F’ graded charter school law,” Kerwin wrote. “In fact, some of the provisions are a step backwards.”

There was no immediate comment from Hogan. *Washington Post*, 4.27.15

THE HISTORY OF THE CENTER FOR EDUCATION REFORM

CER was founded in 1993 “to restore educational excellence, and to expand access and accountability in America’s schools.” Having worked both in the government and think tank world in Washington, DC, CER founder Jeanne Allen saw the connection lacking between the ideas advanced on paper and the advancement of those ideas in real communities. In addition to providing national leadership on education reform, which was essentially non-existent, CER was designed to be a pro-active group that would work to raise the visibility and acceptance of education reform and point out the obstacles to good education in the state legislatures, the mainstream media, Congress, and among “ordinary” people – like parents and even teachers, whose information streams were almost solely driven by special interests. While adopting this basic, new approach to advancing public policy, CER wanted to separate itself from the ideological labels that often accompanied any institution that had advanced notions of educational choice. By bringing together normal citizens, mainstream civic leaders, minorities, and people from both parties, and by changing the semantics of the debate, the theory was that CER would be able to fulfill the mission of expanding access (i.e. choice) and accountability; two notions that nearly all Americans embrace in the absence of ideological messengers.

CER’s first funders were William J. Hume, founding Chairman and Schwan’s Sales Enterprises in Marshall, Minnesota. Later, the Bradley Foundation and then the Walton Family Foundation were welcomed as supporters. By early 1995, CER had a staff of four, a budget of slightly over \$300,000 and an active database of 5,000 people who were reached with weekly fax-alerts (yes, it was before the Internet!) and updates, publications and calls-to-action.

The Center had succeeded in its initial quest to be identified primarily in the mainstream. Strong relationships with network news, major daily papers, and radio were forged and the organization became a regular commentator on the pressing issues. New customers who defied party affiliation were identified and bridges built among very diverse groups and people. CER’s 1995 Washington-based conference, “Lessons from the States,” drew more than 130 grassroots people to Washington, DC from states and communities. Among those was the Chairman of the bi-partisan Joint Committee on the Public Schools in New Jersey, and his permanent staff person, who took the ideas they learned from then Arizona state superintendent Lisa Keegan and California charter pioneer Yvonne Chan and set about working on the bill which would eventually become New Jersey’s charter law with the Center’s constant assistance. Its brokering and network functions were widely recognized, and over the years, it would unite reformers from hundreds of localities that would otherwise never have known each other and benefited from the experiences they shared, netting The Center for Education Reform impact and recognition in over 40 states and the District of Columbia for its leadership and contributions in advancing the creation of new laws.

From its inception, the organization’s mission was organized around three basic functions:

As an *Information Clearinghouse* working pro-actively to *inform* the public, with a heavy focus on groups of parents, teachers, business leaders and citizens, who have a larger sphere of influence than just one person.

As an *Educational ‘Johnny Appleseed,’* helping to create groups and make those just sprouting more effective in doing their education reform work, guiding them to solutions, services and counsel that would aid their school effort.

And as a *Broker of People and Ideas*, linking reform-minded citizens and policymakers to create and strengthen alliances to advance reform.

Because of the individualized attention The Center has and continues to give to the experiences and stories of individual people, schools, and policy-making bodies, its recommendations, analyses and contacts are considered highly credible and influential.

THANK YOU
FOR YOUR
SUPPORT!



1901 L STREET, NW, SUITE 705
WASHINGTON, DC 20036
(800) 521-2118

WWW.EDREFORM.COM
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