



Making Schools Work Better for all Children

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There's plenty happening in the news this week, but among the most topical are issues surrounding charter schools. Hence, most of our discussion focuses on ...

* **CHARTER SCHOOLS:** The National School Boards Association has just released a report on charter schools which purports to show that charter schools are "not meeting early promises." This is a surprise to the more than 2,000 charters around the country, and the parents supporting them, but it's no surprise that the NSBA – never a friend of the charter movement – would issue such a report. After all, the dozen or more lawsuits filed against charter proposals around the country have been initiated by state school boards associations, taking a cue from the national folks. CER is preparing a review of the 50+ studies at the state, local and national level, and you'll be hearing more from us on this. But in the meantime . . .

* **CHARTER INNOVATION:** Although the NSBA says charters are "not innovative," Minnesota's charter school law was selected as one of ten winners of the 2000 "Innovations in American Government Award" and received a \$100,000 grant from the Ford Foundation. The first state charter law (and 3rd strongest) was authored by State Senator Ember Reichgott June (Democratic-Farm Labor Party), who accepted, noting "This is a tribute to the Minnesota Legislature for its collective vision and political will to take risks and create new opportunities for children." Check out the award at www.innovations.harvard.edu.

* **BLOB BLOCKS ON CHARTERS:** Meanwhile, the NSBA's claim to school board objectivity is belied by the action going on in...

- **VERONA, WISCONSIN** where the Core Knowledge Charter School is at risk of not being renewed because the school board wants to take back control and make it a "choice" school. One of the reasons: the charter school's demographics don't quite match up with the district's. Who controls pupil registration? The School Board. Who blocked the charter school's effort to produce a video to attract a more diverse student population? The School Board. Who runs the "choice" schools with less-representative demographics? The School Board. Yet another obstacle to effective charters comes from ...
- **LARAMIE, WYOMING** where a group of parents have been working to start a charter school since 1998. Unfortunately, Wyoming law only allows local school boards to charter, which means there's always a request for "more study." And it requires teacher support, which has been

difficult to obtain after a sustained disinformation campaign by the teachers union, raising charges of segregation, end of tenure, end of promotions and retaliation from colleagues. Despite a \$10,000 planning grant, the group is stymied by the nation's 6th weakest charter law and a status-quo school board. But it's not just local school boards. In . . .

- **GEORGIA**, state school board member Cathy Henson and Chairman Otis Brumby are proving their "objectivity" by throwing roadblocks into the path of any oncoming charter applications. Under their proposal, charters (but not regular public schools) would have to: "prove" in advance that their school will have higher student achievement than existing schools; require a monthly cash flow statement and a list of parents who will sign up to volunteer; explain why they may not hire certified teachers, and go before a review committee that includes a local school board member but not a representative from the State Department of Education, among other items. Said the *Atlanta Journal*: "These new proposals appear to be measures to discourage enthusiastic parents, educators, community leaders and businesses from initiating state-chartered schools or appealing the local school board rejection to the state."

* **AND THE GOOD NEWS IS:** Washington state's charter school initiative continues to gain dramatic support. Although the NSBA claims that charters will lead to the "Balkanization" of education, the Seattle Urban League President endorsed I-729 by calling charter schools "the most dramatic development in educational reform since desegregation."

Major newspapers have also weighed in with endorsements, with the *Spokane Spokesman-Review* (which did not consult the NSBA first) noting, "No longer can charter schools be called radical or a threat to the public system. Rather, they are a part of the public system, a choice, a stimulus for new ideas, a center for high-quality instruction. Their successes benefit the public school system as a whole by providing models for reform." You can check out the WA charter battle by checking www.Wacharterschools.org.

* **THREE SHOPPING WEEKS 'TILL ELECTION DAY**, and before you decide which candidate gets your vote you should find out which candidate supports your views on a wide range of education reforms. Use CER's [Candidate Education Meter](#) to determine their real support for education reform. The meter asks the tough questions, and good candidates give the tough answers.

* **CHARTER SCHOOLS THAT WORK**, the PBS show featuring columnist Clarence Page, is in the middle of its TV run. If your local station has still not shown it, you should contact them and urge a viewing (or even a repeat performance). Perfect for programmers trying to get past the elections.

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