



Making Schools Work Better for all Children

Newsire - October 3, 2000

October 3, 2000
CER Newsire
Vol. 2, No. 36

* **CURRICULUM:** The National School Boards Association publishes a glowing front page article in "School Board News," describing the successful effort of Nancy Ichinaga to raise reading scores at the Bennett/Kew Elementary School. The story accurately describes her battles (and those of two other principals) against bilingual education and in favor of phonics, using Open Court's basal reading series. We won't get too excited about change, though.
Read the report at www.nsba.org/sbn/00-Sep/092600-4.htm.

Speaking of curriculum, PBS took the time to highlight the use of Direct Instruction at City Springs Elementary in Baltimore in a 90-minute documentary entitled "The Battle of City Springs." Credit again was given to a determined principal, Bernice Whelchel, who instituted the program described by one reviewer as "worlds away from the touchy-feely methods beloved of most education professors." The PBS broadcast was last Friday, but experience has told us dates and times vary, so check your local listings. To find out the name and phone number of your local PBS station, go to www.pbs.org/whatson/index.html. If they haven't run the program yet, tell them they should.

They should also be running the program CER helped create, entitled "Charter Schools That Work," also premiering last weekend on PBS.

In Columbiana, AL, a local school board member is demanding that an English teacher explain why her eighth-grade students are spending time reading Shakespeare and Chaucer. Seems Middle School teacher Pam Cooper learns what is being presented at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival each year, and then gets copies for her students who read it, act it out, write about certain lines and make a vocabulary list. The result is that the high school teachers then complain that Cooper has taught Chaucer and Shakespeare texts that children might encounter in high school. The result? A movement to dumb it down for gifted 8th graders. Didn't Shakespeare write more than one play, anyway?

* **ACHIEVEMENT:** And in Arizona, charter school Tempe Prep went from a 19% pass rate on the state AIMS math test to an 80% pass rate this year - even as the state average was only 17%. The key certainly wasn't the demographics of the school - a nearby and demographically-comparable high school achieved only a 25%. In general, third grade scores in reading and writing were good but, according to the Arizona Republic, "fewer than half met the math standards." As some have suggested by similar national trends, the longer American kids stay in school, the worse they seem to perform. Middle schoolers did dismally, with only 52% of 8th graders passing the reading exam and 48%

passing writing. Less than 50% met standards for math.

While the state is revising some of the test for the next round, leaders say they are not budging from the standards which are an early warning sign and can serve as a wake up call to schools throughout the state. Maybe they should start by calling Tempe Prep and getting their equation for how to be successful. To see how Arizona and California schools compare see www.greatschools.net or go www.ade.state.az.us for info on scores.

* CER is now out with an updated version of "Nine Lies About School Choice: Answering the Critics." In it we modestly refute the nine most common mistruths from the critics of school choice. Catch it on our website [here](#).

Also available, just in time to identify who the true reformers are running for office: "The Candidate Education Meter: Measuring the Reform Depths of those Running for Office." You can get it from our website [right here](#). or get a really nifty-looking sample by e-mailing us at cer@edreform.com

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