



*Making Schools Work Better for all Children*

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With a central focus on charter schools, again, this newsire points out that even with a middle of the road school reform like charter schools, efforts to derail the train continue unabated...

- **NEW YORK:** The Empire Strikes Back: Central Islip School District is unabashedly recruiting parents to oppose the establishment of the Nehemiah Charter School, a charter slated to open next fall. Seems parents have been showing up at their parent-teacher conferences and teachers are demanding that they sign a petition opposing the establishment of this school. According to one parent this happened to: "When I asked the teacher pointed questions like doesn't the school district still get 25% of the state money for each child that attends the charter, I was told 'I don't know.' But she started off by telling me that my taxes would go up because of all the money the district would lose. I then asked 'well wouldn't the charter fail if it wasn't better than the schooling my children were getting now?' she said she really didn't know much about it. So I asked how she could be recommending against the charter, and she said she was told that all the teachers had to ask the parents to sign the petition. I feel this is a very underhanded tactic. Also I was very upset that my tax dollars were being used to persuade parents to sign something they know little or nothing about."

Last year, upon learning that there was a proposal in the making to establish this school, the same school district held a meeting to create outrage. Parents called us then, too, looking for accurate information.

Interestingly, there is a pattern developing in the Empire State, that makes chad-counting look like a game of dodge ball! In Glen Cove, NY, where a charter school is being proposed, one school board member who supports its creation was asked to resign. What was that about the democratic process that the school boards associations keep chanting?

- **WASHINGTON STATE** charter organizers have picked themselves up and dusted off and are starting over again as they organize their statewide charter school conference which begins this Friday at the Washington State Convention & Trade Center in downtown Seattle. A star-studded crowd of charter leaders, teachers, experts and parents will assemble to discuss and forward the idea. Scholarships for registration are available thanks to the generosity of the Bill and Melinda

Gates Foundation. To register call: 888-279-6937 or visit <http://www.WAcharterschools.org/conference.htm>

- **TEXAS** is the scene of another charter school forum convened by charter school activist Kyev Tatum in San Marcos, TX. The December 12th event features University of Texas Professor Jim Scheurich and Charter Schools USA Executive Vice President Glenn Pierce. The event is sponsored by the Mitchell Center in conjunction with the Texas Hill Country Branch of the NAACP, the San Marcos Preparatory Charter School, and others. For information, contact <http://www.kyev@mitchellcenter.org>.
- **SOUTH CAROLINA:** And the demand for charter schools is alive and well in the Palmetto state, where legislators will be fixing a law whose provision for quotas was thrown out by the courts last year. While there are only 8 charters there, a growing number of social service and youth advocates are mobilizing for change.
- **NATIONALLY:** And next week marks the start of the third National Charter School Conference put on by the U.S. Department of Education, in which charter operators and service providers and friends gather in Washington, DC to learn, network, explore and improve the work they do. For information, go to <http://www.USCharterschools.org> on the web.

\* **POLITICS:** And speaking of the U.S. Department of Education, rumors of new appointees in a Bush Administration are flying, and some rumors are so high that they seem out of sight. The one about outgoing NC Governor Jim Hunt actually becoming Secretary of Education under George W. Bush is something that was extremely disconcerting to education reformers. According to a wide variety of plentiful sources in NC (and some independent analysis) Governor Hunt is considered actively ANTI-reform, having:

- a) sought the demise of charter schools;
- b) accused parents who want choices from schools that have dismally failed of abandoning public schools, and
- c) having led a union-dominated institution that awards professional credentials to teachers based not on performance but on observation and is 100% establishment, not reform-oriented.

When it comes to standards and testing, which political leaders in both parties give Hunt enormous credit for, it seems that his ABC Program to help bolster achievement is a good one, but the progress is owing to the ease of the test rather than real reform. According to the John Locke Foundation based in Raleigh, in 1999, 69 percent of students in grades 3-8 scored at grade level in reading and math, which is a 16 percent increase in one year. However, to achieve grade level, 8th graders can get just 37 percent of questions right. In math, only 15 percent of elementary questions and 10 percent of middle school questions involved computation. Spelling and grammar don't count in 4th and 7th graders. And the list of deficiencies of the accountability program as it is currently structured go on and on.

\* **SCHOOL CHOICE:** Mayor Rudy Giuliani of New York City is convening, with the Manhattan Institute, a conference to explore school choice in the Big Apple. The event is on December 13th at the

Millennium Broadway Hotel, and includes topics like "Report from the Grassroots," "Synthesizing the Evidence," and "Choice and the Constitution." The outstanding speaker lineup includes Milwaukee School Board President John Gardner, Miami Urban League president T. Willard Fair, Pennsylvania Secretary of Education Eugene Hickok, Milwaukee Mayor John Norquist, and Governors Frank Keating (OK) and Gary Johnson (NM). For information, contact (212) 788-2555.



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