



Making Schools Work Better for all Children

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· **CHARTER KUDOS:** Five Michigan Charter Schools are among 169 elementary schools in line to receive Golden Apple awards for demonstrating outstanding improvement and performance. Michigan has 173 charter schools and 3,286 traditional public schools.

The Golden Apple Awards - a program proposed by Gov. John Engler and pending approval from the Michigan legislature - recognizes schools that have done the most to create an exceptional learning environment. The Golden Apple Awards program has two components - outstanding improvement to schools increasing their composite score on the fourth and fifth grade Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) tests by 60 points over two years and outstanding performance to the state's highest achieving elementary schools. If the Legislature approves the Golden Apple program, Michigan would put their money where their mouth is. Each full-time employee of the winning schools would receive \$1,000 and each school would be allocated \$10,000 to use on improvements determined by the principal.

· Congratulations to Idaho's Da Vinci Charter Academy who's project was unanimously approved March 28, 2000. Backers of the Academy expect to open the school this fall for 120 ninth and tenth graders. Future plans include expansion to eleventh and twelfth grade and 240 students. The school will teach traditional subjects as well as art history and psychology, expect students to do volunteer work and internships at local businesses and provide a 15-to-1 student-to-teacher ratio.

Referring to public schools, John Sarchio, the school's principal organizer, stated, "It's my belief that one size does not fit all. We need alternatives." Idaho has been working towards offering alternatives, since passing legislation allowing charters in 1998. Da Vinci is Idaho's ninth charter school and the first in Bonner County.

· **THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY:** The good news is that the New York State Board of Regents approved opening 10 new charter schools this fall serving approximately 2,000 students across the state. The bad news is that they rejected four other charter schools. A Long Island charter school was among the rejected after panel members expressed concern that the charter would draw too much money away from the already troubled school district.

And finally, the ugly, or the "round and round we go" . . . All 14 charter schools were approved by the trustees of the State University of New York, the other state body given authority over the approval of charter schools. Under the unusual terms of the charter school law, any application

approved by the SUNY trustees, but rejected by the Regents, goes back to SUNY for further consideration. It would then go back to the Regents and so on. We'll keep you posted.

·SUMMER READING TO BE CUT: In Virginia, Prince William County schools chief Edward Kelly wants to cut back the summer reading requirement. He wants to do this in response to parents' complaints that summertime should be reserved for activities that are fun. Mr. Kelly proposes that the required reading list become a "suggested list." Students would get rewards for reading books on the list, but no penalty for failing to read them. Low reading skills is not considered a penalty.

This comes at a time when school districts are seeking ways to increase children's reading skills and when national studies recommend a longer school year or another form of summer instruction because teachers spend too much time in the fall reviewing lessons forgotten during the summer.

In the U.S. only 23% of fourth graders and 28% of eighth graders are proficient readers.

·AMERICAN HISTORY: A survey commissioned by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni revealed that 4 out of 5 (81%) seniors recently surveyed from America's elite colleges and universities received a grade of D or F on history questions drawn from a basic high school curriculum.

Students can now graduate from 100% of the top colleges without taking a single course in American History.

Some of the key findings:

- Over one-third were unable to identify the U.S. Constitution as establishing the division of power in American government.
- Only 26% were familiar with the Emancipation Proclamation.

However, students received nearly perfect scores on contemporary pop culture:

- 99% knew the cartoon characters Beavis and Butthead.
- 98% can identify the rap singer Snoop Doggy Dog.

Maybe students would know their American History or would be interested in reading it during the summer if it was provided to them in a vivid, narrative, captivating manner. Although most history books used in the classroom are improving, many rely on the use of pictures, graphs and cartoons rather than strong writing. A good example of history revisited and retold in full detail can be found in Joy Hakim's "A History of Us" - a textbook for middle- and upper-elementary school students.

Books like Hakim's are being used in a growing number of schools nationwide. But most schools use "them to supplement their regular history textbook rather than to replace it." Main textbooks are usually the ones chosen by state or local school boards based on curriculum standards.



