



Making Schools Work Better for all Children

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CHARTER SCHOOLS: The celebration in honor of charter schools last week around the nation was met by some ill-timed news from both the District of Columbia and Florida that charters are not complying with various audit and financial requirements in a timely fashion. Such "front page" news wasn't met with any commensurate stories about progress at charters in the same newspapers, nor was the story behind both reports as bad as the headlines made it sound.

Meanwhile, the long arm of Washington is going to be reaching out and touching charter schools more intensively, no thanks to a proclamation from President Clinton, upon his visit to the nation's first charter school, that he has asked the U.S. Department of Education to issue "guidelines" about business and religious participation in charter schools. Guidelines is "code" for regulation, a word that charters were started to largely escape from in order to devote full time to kids, not rules. Link for more information [About Charter Schools](#).

TESTING: While some parents and education groups are campaigning against standards and tests that require passage before one can move on through school, states like Colorado are proving the value of sticking to the program. Third graders there made gains for the second straight year on the state's reading test, with 69 percent meeting the standard for reading. Scores for poor children also rose in a positive move toward closing learning gaps in the Centennial State. For more information, check out www.cde.state.co.us/cdedepcom/as_00read3press_release.htm.

ACCOUNTABILITY: Pennsylvania's legislature has put a sunset on academically-famished districts, and passed a bill last week allowing the state to take over districts which fail to improve in three years (plus the previous twenty that each of them have had). School districts like Wilkinsburg to the west and Philly to the east would lose their authority over funding and programs if taken over. Harrisburg, the state's capital, was put under immediate control of the city's mayor, and Chester-Upland is now under state control as a result of this and previous moves by the legislature. Unlike most states, the Pennsylvania plan builds structural changes into any takeover, making it likely that such a move would more readily benefit kids. Go to www.pde.psu.edu to find out more about this story.

CURRICULUM: Parents across Maryland — and especially in affluent Montgomery County — are scratching their heads at the dismal state of math progress among students. Just 36 percent of ninth graders in this one county passed an Algebra 1 exam, which is all the starker given that the county

prides itself on math and science instruction. As local boards in the state are coming up with ways to figure out what new programs to buy, they should look toward the sage wisdom of the scientists at [*Mathematically Correct!*](#) to give them clues to the needed turn around. Maryland is awash in fuzzy math, so it's no surprise that even the most likely high performers did poorly.



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