



*Making Schools Work Better for all Children*

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\* **STANDARDS:** *Education Week* has just issued its annual "Quality Counts" analysis, and while we haven't had a solid chance to compare their analysis, we were surprised to find that Virginia (where the standards have been acclaimed by everyone from the American Enterprise Institute to the American Federation of Teachers), garners only a "B" on their standards, while Maryland's standards score a solid "A."

This will no doubt come as a surprise to a panel of leading academic experts who participated in an independent evaluation to review the MSPAP tests to determine how they measured student achievement against expectations.

Writing in the *Baltimore Sun*, the leader of the group, Stanford political scientist Bill Evers noted that science questions had experiments that would not work as claimed or were potentially hazardous, the wording of the U.S. Constitution was confused with the wording of the Declaration of Independence, sample student answers used to train graders had Mahatma Gandhi as a woman and another had the Pilgrims landing in Maryland.

Student answers that were grammatically correct received zero credit, while another student giving an answer that was grammatically incorrect and did not adhere to the question was given a "satisfactory" grade.

His conclusion? "It became quickly evident to our panel that students do not need to have learned much of anything of substance from their lessons to do well on the MSPAP."

It probably would have done *Education Week* good to have looked at the 300-page evaluation done by Evers' panel, but they couldn't: The Maryland Department of Education has embargoed it, and refuses to release the complete report.

\* **SCHOOL CHOICE:** School choice supporters were heartened by the decision of House Republican leaders to place supporters at the head of two key committees. Bypassing representatives with more seniority, Rep. John Boehner, of Ohio, was chosen to chair the Education and Workforce Committee; and Rep. William Thomas will chair the key revenue committee of House Ways and Means. Both men have supported school choice proposals, including legislation to allow school districts to provide scholarships for low-income students to attend public or private schools, and an initiative to put a pilot voucher program in Washington, DC for 2,000 low-income children.

\* **CHARTER SCHOOLS:** Mississippi has had the distinction of having the nation's worst public charter law, with the result that after three years the state has only one charter school. But now hope is on the horizon for some improvement. Mississippi House Education Chairman Joe Warren has introduced legislation to expand the number of chartering authorities and permit the creation of new schools (current law only allows conversion of existing public schools). For the first time, the proposal would also address transportation (state shall provide), governance issues, and start-up assistance (creates a state revolving loan fund).

\* **REISSUED:** An outstanding book, *Ed School Follies*, has just been reissued and is available in an on-line format at <http://www.iUniverse.com>. Originally published a few years ago, the book underscores the problems at today's Education Schools and the degree to which the idea of achievement has been driven out of the practices taught to future teachers. This a must-read, and we urge you to check it out!

\* **WINNER, PART I:** Add one more survey to the batch showing support for school choice. A January 3, 2001 Harris poll conducted on the [excite.com](http://excite.com) website shows 54% (32,812 votes) supporting school vouchers, 39% (24,002 votes) opposing choice, and 6% (3,777 votes) not sure.

\* **WINNER, PART II:** Congratulations to Cammie Montgomery, Principal of the East End Community Heritage School in Cincinnati, OH. Ms. Montgomery dropped her business card in the fish bowl at the Center for Education Reform's December 7 party at the National Zoo celebrating charter school achievements during the recent National Charter School Conference in Washington, DC, and was selected - by blindfold - to attend our *Leader's Forum* on March 28, at our expense, here in Washington, DC.

The *Leaders Forum* is an opportunity to showcase good things happening in grassroots education reform to the busy world of Washington - and even if you didn't win the contest, we hope you'll be a winner by marking your calendar and making plans to join us on that date. Details will follow soon.



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