



Making Schools Work Better for all Children

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* **STANDARDS:** "Alfie Kohn, please call your office." That's no doubt the emergency message sent to the anti-testing guru when test scores from the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) were released yesterday, showing that rigorous testing can motivate students to succeed. Results from the MCAS shows that 82 percent of 10th graders passed English, compared to 66 percent last year; and 75 percent passed math, up from 55 percent in 2000.

The tests are important because, for the first time, the Class of 2003 will have to demonstrate a 10th grade knowledge in English and math in order to graduate.

Predictably, the "never-say-die" opponents didn't see any good news in the results, having expressed their feelings that students would not be better "critical thinkers" as a result - even though content knowledge and critical thinking go hand in hand.

A more thoughtful response came from William Edgerly, chairman of Business for Better Schools, who noted that he had attended an MCAS rally at Springfield's Central High School last spring, where students were told by athletic and academic stars that hard work was the key to success. "After the rally," Edgerly notes, "a student said the speeches helped him believe he could pass. Instead of being told that the test was too hard, this student was filled with the spirit that he too could succeed."

For the MCAS results, go to: www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/

For news articles: go to: www.boston.com/globe/

* **MARYLAND:** The state tests in the Old Line state have come under attack for their failure to judge the abilities of individual students. More than 40 parents and teachers met at Bowie State University at a "Maryland Education Summit" last week, arguing that the state needs to make major changes to improve student learning. "It demeans and diminishes the pursuit of pure knowledge and basic skills," declared Annapolis High School teacher Phil Greenfield.

[click here for more](#)

* **CHOICE:** Effective schools are so popular that they often turn away students for lack of space, so Milwaukee's Partners Advancing Values in Education (PAVE) plans to team up with banks and the Bradley Foundation to offer \$40 million in low-interest loans to choice and charter schools for building improvements. The loans will offer rates that may be below prime and will also be available to private

schools in partnership with Milwaukee Public Schools' neighborhood schools initiative. The first loan totaling \$1.8 million will go to Harambee Community School, La Causa and Salam schools, and the Milwaukee Center for Independence's School for Early Development and Achievement.

*** NEW BEGINNINGS:** This morning, the students of Westport Academy, a Baltimore public school, are enjoying Open House ceremonies celebrating the reopening of their school. More importantly, they're enjoying the results of a new partnership between Baltimore and Victory Schools, a private provider of school management services to school districts. Where a year ago, Westport had crumbling front steps, undisciplined children and a 25-year-old carpet too old to be cleaned, students today benefit from stricter discipline, a more energized staff, music and art instruction for the first time and a phonics-based reading model called Direct Instruction. "There is structure here, and you have everyone on the same page at the same time," says Marjorie Miles, who is helping to administer the school. "It is like going from an ugly duckling to a beautiful swan."

Students in Philadelphia are also getting a new beginning, with the opening this year of the Russell Byers Charter School. Named after Philadelphia Daily News columnist Russell Byers, who wrote passionately about education and was murdered during a robbery in 1999, the school helps to preserve his legacy by inspiring and educating future generations. The 160 students come from 32 different inner city neighborhoods, and receive instruction based on Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound, a program that emphasizes learning by doing, character growth, teamwork and literacy. Byers' family is deeply involved in the school - one of only three approved to operate last year by the Philadelphia Board of Education.

*** TEACHERS:** The mantra of "certified teachers means qualified teachers" has been a theme of teacher certification advocates like Linda Darling-Hammond for years. But is there any research to back it up? The Abell Foundation took a look at 150 studies going back 50 years that have been cited as supporting the concept. The conclusion? "The academic research attempting to link teacher certification with student achievement is astonishingly deficient," suffering from conclusions without any evidence, serious statistical errors, inaccurate evidence and ignoring negative findings. The report also looks at other teacher qualities, such as verbal ability, and its impact on teacher effectiveness.

For the Abell Study, go to: www.abell.org

*** REVENGE ON CHARTERS?:** Earlier this year, Ball State University became the first Indiana college to announce it would authorize charter schools, as permitted under that state's new charter law. But instead of welcoming a collaborative effort, the superintendents of Fort Wayne and Allen County public schools are seeking to ban Ball State student-teachers and administrators from their schools. "This is a serious attack on public education," intoned Fort Wayne Schools Superintendent Thomas Fowler-Finn, thus treating one of Indiana's premier teachers colleges as an enemy rather than a partner. The two superintendents would either ban the students or the administrators who assess them, but in any event would cut off a university that produces up to 700 prospective teacher a year. The same tactic has been tried - with no success - in by superintendents in Michigan and by school employee unions in Pennsylvania.

But the blow-up in Indiana hasn't stopped Ball State from reviewing more than 20 letters of interest. Preliminary applications are due by November 16, and a decision on those is expected by February or March.

For more information on Indiana charter schools, go to: www.projecte.org



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