



Making Schools Work Better for all Children

Newsire - December 11, 2001

December 11, 2001
Vol. 3, No. 48
December 11, 2001

* **SCHOOL CHOICE:** Let the debate begin! The U.S. Supreme Court has scheduled oral arguments for February 20, 2002, at 10:00 a.m., to hear *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris*, also known as the Cleveland school choice case. The high Court will determine whether the program, currently helping roughly 4,000 Cleveland children escape chronically failing schools through scholarships at participating private schools, can continue. CER was joined in filing an amicus, or "friend of the Court," brief by 27 other groups, organizations and individuals, representing tens of thousands of interested parents and civic, community and elected leaders. The brief urges the Court to consider the context in which the program was enacted - 25 years of failed education reform and only one of multiple educational options created by the state of Ohio - in determining whether lawmakers acted constitutionally to fulfill their mandate of providing a fair and equitable education to all children. At least 20 other groups representing a bipartisan convergence of governors, mayors, attorneys general, legislators, scholars and civil liberties groups filed separate briefs in support of the program, as did the U.S. Solicitor General.

To view CER's brief, [click here](#) (.pdf format).

* **HELPING HANDS:** Valley Academy in Phoenix, AZ is a K-12 college-prep charter school in its fifth year of successful operation, with consistent test score increases from year to year. It is one of the top performing public schools in the state. Seventh-grader Adam Shali has been nominated for the second time as a "People to People" student ambassador for Summer 2002. The program, founded in 1963 by Dwight Eisenhower, teaches young people leadership skills, goal setting, planning, teamwork and more. Adam couldn't afford to attend with his delegation to the U.K. last year. This year, the Australia trip is also out of reach. Why is this a reform issue? Well, in most traditional public schools and districts, money is allocated to assist participation in these programs. But charter schools are traditionally on tight, if not sub-par, budgets. If anyone wants to help Adam, email us at cer@edreform.com.

* **CHARTERS:** Charter schools in Florida are embracing new accountability that will require schools in operation for at least one year and serving not less than 30 students to be graded based on their FCAT scores. The move is a result of the path-breaking A+ Plan which since 1999 has been grading schools based on state test scores and allowing children in persistently failing schools to go to a school of their choice. Charter operators welcomed the move. Said one colleague, "If I walk into a legislator's office, drop on the desk a list of charter schools and how they are performing compared to other schools, the legislator will be more receptive than if I say, "Trust me." Last year, the Pembroke Pines

elementary and middle charter schools were rewarded for their "A" performance with bonuses of nearly \$100,000. They were two of seven charter schools in the state to receive money for high achievement and this was the first year that any charter school has been recognized. Not only will charters have to test now, but the public will be able to make meaningful judgments about their performance as well.

* **URBAN TROUBLES:** California officials poised to allow Compton, CA to run its own school affairs again may want to think twice before allowing the district to discover good education on its own. While the eight-year long state takeover forced debt to be eliminated, the schools are still among the worst in the state. The benefit of takeovers normally is that the bureaucracy and corruption that pervades many cities is uncovered and at least partially eliminated to allow for the resolution of things like bad plumbing and inadequate textbook supplies. Unfortunately, such state intervention rarely, if ever, results in educational improvement. California leaders may want to consider the more dramatic moves being pushed in Philly, or even nearby Chester, PA where the state's intervention resulted in new schools being set up and much-needed choices among at least a small number of children. Or they could consider the lessons of Florida or Milwaukee, where varied school choice programs rippled throughout the otherwise complacent system and forced a response that while slow, was steady. For more, [click here](#).

* **UNIONS:** Many local unions are fighting over power and money while all around them, educational problems persist.

*In Clark County, NV, the Teamsters and the Nevada State Education Association, an NEA affiliate, are battling it out over who will represent support workers.

*Teachers in Middletown, NJ last week went on strike and the Superior Court Judge ordered them back to work. When they didn't go back, he called each teacher, in alphabetical order, before the bench and told them to go back to work. If they refused, they were to be sent to jail. By Thursday night, 228 teachers were jailed--about a quarter of the staff. The New York Times reported that "Many of the teachers made impassioned speeches about willingness to suffer the consequences of their defiance, their love of the job and their contempt for Board of Education leaders." Three teachers resigned or retired in the courtroom rather than face jail time. The strike ended Friday afternoon, and the two sides are currently entering into negotiations Worth Repeating: New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani accused the teachers union of risking grave damage to the city by seeking a 22 percent wage hike--despite the city's budget deficit following the September 11 tragedy. Randi Weingarten, president of the United Federation of Teachers, responded that the union was making the same demands as before the terrorist attack, and accused Mr. Giuliani of exploiting the tragedy to avoid paying teachers.

* **FEDERAL POLICY:** After months of bickering, robust debate and negotiation, a House-Senate conference committee working on the education bill is completing work on an agreement that institutes yearly testing - though what and how is left to the states - some additional flexibility for states (though not as much as many would have liked), and flexibility for teacher quality programs. Timing for final passage in both the House and the Senate is still being worked out.

EDUCATION LEGISLATION: Real accountability is closer to reality with the passage of the Conference Committee report on the long-awaited and highly-touted Education Bill.



800-521-2118 • 301-986-8088 • Fax: 301-986-1826

www.edreform.com • cer@edreform.com

copyright © 2013