



Making Schools Work Better for all Children

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HAPPY HOLIDAYS: After this issue of the CER Newsire, we'll be taking a break for the Holidays and will see you again on January 8, 2002. In the meantime, check out CER's special [Holiday Monthly Letter to Friends](#) for more updates, news of reform and reports that will help you in your efforts. Happy Holidays, Merry Christmas, Happy New Year and God speed!

* **URBAN REFORM:** The scene is more like plot from a spy movie than an education reform effort. There are the clear villains, a leaked report that exposes the plot to destroy the perpetrators, the masked bandit, and the innocent villagers. The place: Philadelphia, PA. The plot: Rescue the children from failing schools. The motive: Good will and money. The problem: A lack of backbone, vested interests and power. A report, written at the request of Philly Mayor John Street and leaked last week, suggests the Mayor deliberately should cause disruptions in the event of a takeover. Both sides have until midnight Friday to come to an agreement. Hopefully there won't be any more plot twists in this ongoing saga.

* **CHARTERS:** Michigan parents turned out in droves to tell a state charter commission that they love their charter schools and want the opportunity to have more of them. Three hundred parents showed up to voice their opinion and let the commission know they are doing the right thing for their children.

Also in Michigan, word of success in one of the nation's larger private charter school companies came earlier this month. The National Heritage Academies (NHA), which runs 28 schools in 3 states, was the first of about a dozen national firms to earn a profit. NHA schools offer a full, core knowledge-based curriculum in basic, no-nonsense buildings that house the standard music and art rooms, libraries, playgrounds and fields. Their educational results are also growing. For more information on NHA, go to their website at <http://www.heritageacademies.com>.

* **PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS:** You can learn more about NHA and companies like it in a CER report of private companies called "Public-Private Partnerships: A Consumer's Guide" due out January 7. The report profiles the companies and provides contact information for the school, as well as some brief history and commentary on the movement. Targeted to the potential buyer of services from both for-profit and non-profit companies working in public schools, this one of a kind publication is a must read. It sells for \$29.95 and is available by calling 800-521-2118. Call today to reserve your copy!

* **CHARTERS II:** More California parents will have a chance at a better school thanks to a move by the State Board of Education, which overruled a Los Angeles-area school district's decision against approving a new charter high school. The applicant has a proven track record at his previous charter, the Animo Leadership High School, where thirty percent more students — most of whom are Hispanic — passed the English and Math portions of the state's exam than in the traditional school district. Take a look at the great things Steve Barr and the staff have been doing at <http://www.animoleadership.org>.

* **SCHOOL BOARDS:** Wide disparity of opinion exists among school boards nationwide with regard to charter schools according to the results of a poll by the American School Board Journal. Eighteen percent of respondents said "some level of regulation is required in charters," and 35 percent "wanted charter schools left alone." Conversely, 47 percent said that the same level of accountability should be required of charters as is required of public schools, which begs the question, what is accountability? Under current standards, that would mean that most charters would have to reduce their standards of accountability, as charters in most states are being required to perform at a much higher standard than traditional public schools in order to stay in business.

* **SCHOOL BOARDS II:** In New York state the School Boards Association has adopted as a position for 2002 this holdover from last year: "NYSSBA shall seek legislation to establish a moratorium on the granting of additional charters to new charter schools until such time as the Legislature mitigates the negative financial and educational impact of the current charter school law."

Good thing the Buffalo, NY School Board has ignored this central authority's dictum. There, board members have encouraged what would be the first upstate conversion to charters by a majority of willing parents and teachers. Problem is the union leader has balked and is fighting the effort. Watch this space.

* **ACHIEVEMENT:** Under new accountability systems, more and more schools find themselves getting a letter grade. Policymakers are introducing these systems in anticipation of the new federal education bill about to pass and be signed into law.

In Michigan, state Schools Superintendent Tom Watkins announced his plan to do school-based grading starting in '06, based on a series of goals related strictly to performance gains and success in formative skills like reading.

In Georgia, starting in '04, all schools will receive a letter grade in a similar fashion as schools in Florida — based on state tests and other standards. Schools that post failing grades for two or more years will be introduced to some interventions that, while not as bold as Florida, may make some stand up and take notice. Those include public school choice options, conversions to a more flexible charter arrangements or reconstitution.



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