



*Making Schools Work Better for all Children*

Newsire - May 29, 2001

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**Vol. 3, No. 22**

\* **STANDARDS:** Despite the ongoing political attacks on Virginia's Standards of Learning and their accompanying tests, the public - and parents in particular - aren't buying it. According to a poll released by the Commonwealth Educational Policy Institute of Virginia Commonwealth University, 52 percent of Virginia adults say that the SOL program of standards and tests has helped improve learning. The number rises even higher if the respondent had children - 60 percent of parents say the program has been a help in improving education. To see the poll results go to [www.edpolicyvcu.org/commonwealth.htm](http://www.edpolicyvcu.org/commonwealth.htm).

Meanwhile, Washington Post columnist Jay Mathews notes in his on-line only column that an end to state testing systems could mean a return "to the days of baby-sitter schools, when low-income kids were kept as comfortable as possible until being handed a meaningless high school diploma and dumped on the job market." See his full column, ("Class Struggles" 5/22/01) at [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com).

\* **CHOICE:** VCU also surveyed on the subject of choice, asking respondents if they favored or opposed giving parents educational tax credits or vouchers to pay for their child's tuition at a private or parochial school of their choice. Fifty percent of Virginians favored such choice; 40 percent opposed it. But among younger adults, choice is the overwhelming favorite: 70 percent of those aged 29 or younger favored vouchers, compared with 39 percent of those 45-64 and 32 percent of those over age 65. Looks like the closer you've been to experience with traditional public schools, the more you favor alternatives.

\* **CHARTERS:** A new study conducted by Texas A&M economists has found that at-risk charter schools in Texas equal and even surpass traditional public school academic and financial performance. Key findings include the fact that test score improvements for continuing charter students track those of traditional public schools, and continuing at-risk charter students show greater improvement in their TAAS scores in both math and reading than do traditional public school students. Yet, charters are more cost-effective: Total public revenue averaged \$5,564 per pupil at charters vs. \$7,135 per pupil at traditional public schools. To see a copy of "Navigating Newly Chartered Waters: An Analysis of Texas Charter School Performance," log onto [www.tppf.org](http://www.tppf.org).

\* Also in TEXAS, lawmakers spent Memorial Day passing new charter legislation that increases the cap on open-enrollment charter schools from 120 to 215, but also increases the fiscal and academic regulatory burdens. Responsibility and power is shifted from the state board of education to the state

commissioner of education, who is also empowered to develop many of the additional regulations now to be imposed on Texas charters.

\* Meanwhile, in NEW JERSEY, yet another reason why charter laws must be tightly written cropped up in Jersey City, where the Superintendent of Schools has decided to throw charter school children off the yellow school bus. New Jersey state law requires school districts to provide transportation, and Jersey City has been using its school buses to do that for children at the Golden Door Charter School. But Superintendent of Schools Charles Epps has decided that bus tokens can be the same thing - so starting in September, children as young as five will be forced onto urban public transportation for their trip to school. This comes despite earlier internal memoranda outlining concerns about the safety of the children.

And, in that state's community of Englewood, the school board has finally decided to abandon its lawsuit against the Palisades Charter School. The decision, made in secret and not announced for two weeks, came only after a three-year battle and an appeals court decision that rejected the school district's most recent attempt to have the charter school's certification revoked.

\* **FINANCES:** Charter schools are often attacked by their opponents for "not being financially accountable like regular public schools." So what kind of accountability exists in regular public school systems? In San Francisco, the FBI is investigating the disappearance of \$15 million in school construction bond money. In Detroit, the school system discovered \$465,000 in misspent or missing cash in just six schools, including classroom funds spent on staff meals and outings, gifts, cellular phone bills and lawn equipment repair. Accountability? A charter school with these records would be closed and the financial shenanigans ended. Not in the traditional public system. In fact, in Detroit, two principals fired in December for questionable expenditures continue to be paid by the taxpayers.

\* **CHOICE, II:** The fate of nearly 4,000 schoolchildren in Cleveland, and the future of a promising educational reform, depends upon the U.S. Supreme Court's decision to review the case of the Cleveland Scholarship Program. Petitions were filed last week, asking the Court to do just that, on behalf of five families who participate in the program. Cleveland's quarter-century history of education reform has failed to eradicate early and persistent failure, and failed to deliver on its promise to parents and children, and it is vital that the Court examine the scholarship plan as an integral part of modern education reform. CER is considering an amicus brief in support of the petition. For more information, go to [our choice page](#).

\* **CALL FOR ATTORNEYS:** As the "War Against Charters" expands, the need for attorneys willing to provide pro-bono services on behalf of beleaguered schools is expanding as well. CER is seeking to expand its network of attorneys nationally who are willing to use their gifts to help the children in charters. If interested, please contact us at [cer@edreform.com](mailto:cer@edreform.com).



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