



*Making Schools Work Better for all Children*

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\* **TESTING:** The argument for a national benchmark against state tests was never made better than by the North Carolina fifth grade end-of-grade math test this year. This year's edition of the exam, which was not statistically validated, was revised because so many students didn't do well last year. The result was an exam so easy that kids could pass it by answering only 28 percent of the problems correctly, compared with 45 percent last year. Random guessing of the four possible answers would generate a 25 percent correct score.

\* **CHARTERS AND TESTING:** But while the educational establishment's rant against testing has lowered the bar in North Carolina, the Michigan Association of Public School Academies (MAPSA) - the state's charter school association - is stepping up to the plate. Charter educators are filling the gap and raising the bar, consistently making year-over-year gains on the Michigan Educational Assessment Program and national standardized tests.

MAPSA's members adopted a resolution supporting rigorous academic accountability and improved student achievement for all public school students, endorsing the disclosure of student achievement information. According to the Detroit News, between 600 and 950 of Michigan's public schools would be on an "unaccredited" list for failing to meet new standards - among them, 48 percent of charters. But charter leaders aren't backing down.

"Charter schools are leaders in accountability. We aren't making excuses. We're working diligently with students who need help to succeed," said MAPSA president Dan Quisenberry. See the statement at [www.charterschools.org](http://www.charterschools.org)

\* That's the approach in Florida, too, where most of Miami-Dade's charter schools showed a marked improvement on this year's Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test. In fact, the highest middle school math and reading scores in Miami-Dade and Broward Counties were posted by the Miami Shores/Barry University Charter School.

\* **ACCOUNTABILITY:** Public awareness is a big component of accountability, and no state is doing it better than Michigan. Up to 1,500 items of data are now on-line for each of the state's school districts, including summaries of each district's strengths and weaknesses. Provided by a system designed by the school evaluation services division of Standard & Poor's, parents can now easily examine items including student results, spending, return on resources, finances and debt, and more. Critics argue that much of the information was already available, but this is the first time parents and taxpayers can find it

easily all in one place. Pennsylvania is expected to go on-line with its information next. To see the reports, go to [www.ses.standardandpoors.com](http://www.ses.standardandpoors.com).

\* CHARTERS: Hoosiers interested in starting a charter school should sign up to attend Indiana's First Charter School Conference on June 12, aimed at providing information about that state's new charter school law, and the mechanics of starting a charter. Charter operators, founders and authorizers, as well as CER president Jeanne Allen, will gather to provide "hands-on advice" to those interested in getting Indiana's charter movement underway. For more information, or to register, log onto [www.indianacharters.org](http://www.indianacharters.org)

\* In Illinois, two potentially good charter school bills were voted down last week: SB 78 would have raised the cap from 15 to 30 in the city of Chicago, and SB 36 would have increased the amount of start-up loans and grants to charters.

\* TAX CREDITS: Pennsylvania's REACH Alliance scored a success with passage of a new \$30 million tax credit for corporations willing to invest money in better education. Corporations would get a credit against their state taxes of 75 cents for every dollar they invest (90 cents for a multi-year commitment), and at least \$20 million would be earmarked for donations to nonprofit organizations to fund public- or private-school scholarships. The remainder of the credit would be earmarked for innovative public school programs.

\* GOTCHA: CER's May Monthly Letter noted why the phrase "teachers union" should be replaced with "School Employee Union," commenting that the unions - with high proportions of non-teachers - often fail to represent educators. Two recent quotes (courtesy of the Education Intelligence Agency) make the point. The following is a direct quote from National Alliance of Black School Educators Andre Hornsby when asked to explain the high rate of African-American support for school choice: "Black people can be gullible."

And making clear that their emphasis lies in politics, rather than the classroom, American Federation of Teachers Executive Vice President Nat LaCour told the AFT's Northeast regional meeting, "The campaign for 2002 and 2004 must be underway now." To read "The School Employee Unions," go to [CER's May Monthly Letter to Friends](#).



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