



Making Schools Work Better for all Children

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* **FLORIDA STATE:** Volusia County School District is the **first charter-school district in the Sunshine State** and one of a handful nationwide. The ground-breaking decision was made this week by the Florida Board of Education. The three-year pilot program has set 29 performance goals – Hillsborough and Sarasota counties also hope to participate in the pilot program.

Also in the Sunshine State, The Florida Times-Union reports that charters are also a hot button issue tonight in Duval County School Board meeting. The board is meeting regarding the application of four charter proposals.

* From the Pacific Research Institute in San Francisco, comes a report about the **continued failure of the Oakland school district**. "Failing Grade: Crisis and Reform in the Oakland Unified School District," notes Oakland had the greatest percentage of parents (a full 10% more than LA) who moved their children to private schools because of dissatisfaction with the public schools. It cites myriad causes for the system's failure: poor management, fiscal mismanagement, high teacher salaries and benefits (86% of the total budget), poor teacher quality and shortages (HR department let a hard-to-find science teacher slip through the cracks), large input (money) and low output (results), with no accountability tied to funds. When faced with proposals to reform and create new alternatives -- such as the residential charter school proposal proposed by Oakland Mayor and former California Governor Jerry Brown, the school board has demonstrated that politics reign superior to improving schools. For a glimpse at the report. For more information, link to: <http://www.pacificresearch.org>

* A new study by the Greater Philadelphia Urban Affairs Coalition and the Drexel University Foundation's Technical Assistance Center, "Facing Challenges, Forging Solutions" lists **what hinders and helps charter school growth**

- Hurting growth: unclear policies, inadequate funding, strained charter/state/district relations, difficulty recruiting and training qualified staff, lack of expertise and information, and inadequate information resources for parents.
- Helping progress: communication/collaboration and leadership skills, access to supplemental funding, endorsement and support of community leaders, technical support and expertise, student enthusiasm, commitment by board members, professionalism and cooperation, and new

opportunities for parents.

These are common findings that are echoed throughout the years in a number of state and national reports. Some resources that can help charters progress and hinder problems are available through state charter resource centers and groups like Drexel.

* Joining several of its affiliates in cities such as Miami and San Diego, The Greater Sacramento **Urban League is proposing a charter school** for children at risk of dropping out or those who have already left. The group's proposal will go before the Grant Joint Union High School Board.

The proposed charter school would serve up to 100 students who are 16 or older at the new Urban League headquarters. Although the Urban League has as its primary focus the African American community, the charter school would serve students of all ethnic groups, Urban League President James Shelby said. The students could come from any district. "We want to show the other schools that we can reach these students and we can turn them around," said the group's director. The Urban League has helped children before, notably through its "Project Success," a dropout recovery program that served about 400 students of which 90 went on to enroll in community colleges.

* **California's 2000 statewide achievement test results** were released yesterday, July 17. This marks the third year that Stanford 9 Test (SAT 9) part of California's Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) program, has been given to students. Scores improved statewide, most dramatically in math. Students in the elementary grades tended to make more dramatic improvements from the previous years than students in middle and high school. Those in the second and third grades made the most improvement overall.

Reading scores also went up but still lag behind the national average. Much of the credit goes to new curriculum standards adopted and the state's emphasis on basic skills.

Scores can be viewed by going to Great Schools, a free online guide to K-12 schools. Great Schools is very parent friendly and will not only explain the STAR program and give scores for individual school, but also offers ways for parents to get involved to improve education in California. They are located on the web at <http://www.greatschools.net>.



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