



*Making Schools Work Better for all Children*

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\* **CHARTERS:** We had an overwhelming number of comments and queries from last Tuesday's weekly [CER Newsire](#) about efforts in California to put curbs on one type of charter school. We also heard some concerns that we did not give the full picture. Herewith are some additional facts in the "case" which we hope will illuminate better the struggle going on to foster charters while maintaining quality growth:

\* The bill under consideration, SB740, would give the state Board of Education authority to limit funding for home-based charter schools - a kind of charter school which is unique to the Golden State because of a long running Independent Study provision in education law. But proponents point out that SB 740 also gives an unprecedented \$750 per student in facilities funding for schools in the poorest third of CA attendance areas.

One aspect of disagreement currently among supporters is whether the latter achievement should be mixed with an attempt to ensure fiscal accounting in home-based charters.

\* Backing SB 740 are long-time charter school supporters like former school superintendent Don Shalvey and state board chair Reed Hastings.

The impetus for this bill - which is expected to pass with some amendments after the legislature returns from summer recess on August 20 - is no less than eight charter failures, which, while consistent with CER's national research that finds only a 4.5% failure rate overall in charters, is still important to address. The charter community and its leaders have been obsessed with pushing for stronger accountability of all schools and this California situation is an example of how allies are struggling to give the public confidence in charter schools.

\* **TESTING:** Another case for using the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores as an "audit" of tests was offered by Harvard researcher Caroline Hoxby, who used NAEP scores to determine if there was any difference between states that have had report cards for a long time, and those who only recently began a reporting system. Using the NAEP, she determined that those who used report cards had significant gains after beginning their use. Click for [the report](#).

\* More than 49 percent of first-time freshmen at Tennessee state universities took one or more remedial or developmental courses last year, with the state defining remedial instruction as help needed by students who have difficulty constructing sentences or doing simple arithmetic. The costs have driven

the Tennessee Board of Regents to suggest mandating that students needing such help begin their college years at community colleges, instead of four-year institutions. The question should be why nearly one-half of college-bound high school graduates should even need remedial help. Tennessee high schools could take a lesson from the Pacific Rim Charter School in Massachusetts, where a "diploma guarantee," assures that graduates will be able to meet certain standards - or the school will offer the remediation at no cost. For more on this, [click here](#).

\* And at Eastern High School in Bristol, Connecticut, the principal has offered his own solution to tackle failure: abolish failing grades. Students with D1s and F1s would be faced with mandatory after-school sessions, and no grade below a "C" would officially count. Principal V. Everett Lyons says that the proposal will develop a "stronger work ethic" and improve students' self-esteem.

\* **CHOICE:** Good news in Madison, Wisconsin where the budget deal reached late last week accomplishes two things: It makes certain there will be no cutbacks in the Milwaukee Parental Choice and also narrowly expands the Wisconsin charter school law.

\* In Florida, nearly 4,000 school vouchers are expected to be offered for children with disabilities, giving students with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) a "McKay scholarship" (named after the bill's chief sponsor) to attend the school of their choice. Students with serious disabilities are moving away from unresponsive traditional public schools towards schools that fit their needs, with the result that pressure is now being put on the local school systems to improve their programs.

\* And a new survey out from McLaughlin and Associates shows that 73.3% of respondents believe the government should "provide taxpayer funded vouchers to help low-income families send their children to a better public, private, or church-run school." 22.1% said no to vouchers and 4.6% are undecided.

### **VOICES FROM THE FRONT:**

"People leave college with their teacher certificate in hand and they go into a classroom and come to find out they've never really learned how to teach somebody to read. "

--First Lady (and former librarian) Laura Bush



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