



Making Schools Work Better for all Children

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CER Newsire Vol. 3, No. 33 * PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS: Pennsylvania Governor Tom Ridge and Education Secretary Charles Zogby have taken the unprecedented step of hiring Edison Schools, Inc. to develop a plan to save the struggling Philadelphia School District – the first step in the state's effort to develop a long-range plan by September. Philadelphia is one of 12 districts in Pennsylvania where half or more of the students are scoring at extremely low levels. More than 58 percent of the city's children are failing reading and more than 59 percent are failing math. Within five years, deficits are expected to rise to \$1.5 billion. The usual establishment groups immediately attacked the decision, which may lead to a state take-over on October 29, the privatization of the district, or other dramatic actions. The leaders of ACORN, a national group that defeated an attempt to run several schools in New York City, declared "Through privatization you lose accountability." But other community leaders argue there is no accountability now. "We're producing kids here that are just inferior, that will never allow the community development efforts we're attempting to initiate to take real hold," said Abdur-Rahim Islam, who runs several community projects in South Philadelphia and has started a charter school. * **CHARTERS:** All 68 charter schools in Ohio have been served with subpoenas in the Ohio Federation of Teachers' challenge of that state's charter law, and were given 30 days to provide "any and all" of their records (including financial and confidential personnel records). The Ohio Community School Center filed and was granted an extension for the schools, but records are still scheduled to be delivered into the Ohio Teachers' hands by early October, adding a significant undue burden on charters as they prepare for the new school year. Uncovering personnel records would also enable the OFT to engage in a campaign of harassment against teachers working at the charters. Watch this space for more. See [for background](#). * **CHOICE:** Washington Post columnist William Raspberry, who confesses to "having my own private wrestling match over school vouchers," literally turned his Monday column over the Howard Fuller, head of the Black Alliance for Educational Options. In a piece that shouldn't be missed, Fuller documents the struggles he had to make change "within the system" as Milwaukee School Superintendent, finally concluding, "the only way to change a large system is through pressure from the outside.... I remember the old days when we were marching and holding up signs calling for Power to the People. Well, a lot of the people who were holding those signs are now a part of the bureaucracy, and they no longer want the people to have power." [Full column](#). * Another Post columnist has also joined the ranks of those who recognize that the school employee unions don't always have the best interests of children in mind. In his August 4 column, Mark Shields reports that the resolutions adopted at the National Education Association convention "are frankly an embarrassment to all who admire teachers and value education." He goes on to report the NEA's opposition to the abolition of unregulated political "soft money", asking "Is that the NEA membership's message to American schoolchildren? Get yourself a big pile of soft money – like the NEA – and then you are guaranteed a seat in the back rooms?" [See the column](#). * **NEA:** Shields' column was no doubt inspired by Landmark Legal Foundation's release of a report from the

Federal Election Commission (which was sealed soon after Landmark got a copy) showing that the NEA spent millions in members' dues money on behalf of Democratic Party candidates, even while reporting zero expenditures on their income tax returns. In fact, the NEA had veto power over Democratic Party plans and had a seat on numerous coordinated campaign committees. You can see the now-sealed documents at the [Landmark Legal Foundation website](#). * **CURRICULUM:** Evidence that the highly structured Direct Instruction method works has come in from Baltimore, where first graders at City Springs Elementary School scored in the 82nd percentile on national standardized tests. Five years ago, scores were so bad that the entire third grade failed the state reading test. Test scores from schools using Direct Instruction in first and second grade were higher this year than citywide averages. Although condemned by pop-educator Alfie Kohn as "militaristic, abusive, counterproductive," teachers like Clinetta Hill (who originally opposed using the program) have come around because "It works. It really works." Direct Instruction is one of three phonics-based reading programs (the others are Success for All and Open Court reading) being used in Baltimore City Schools. All of them have helped to raise reading scores in that city. For more on the three, go to: Direct Instruction: <http://sra4kids.com/teacher/directin/>
Success for All: www.successforall.net/
Open Court: www.sra4kids.com/teacher/reading/index.html * **CHARTERS II:** Although Maryland has yet to pass a charter school law, organizers of the Jaime Escalante Public Charter School in Montgomery County are hoping that the results of a parent survey at two feeder elementary schools will persuade the local School Board to approve such a school on its own. Overall 70 percent of parents said they favored the Escalante school idea; nearly 50 percent said it sounded like the kind of school they would want their child to attend (46 percent were "not sure"), and more than 46 percent said they would submit an application for their child to attend the school (only 5 percent said they wouldn't). Click here for more on the [Jaime Escalante Charter School](#). The results should not only spur the Montgomery board to approve the school, but should be used in the state's capital to make the point that the demand for charters is evident even in the high performing schools of suburban Washington, DC. [More information here.](#)



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