



Making Schools Work Better for all Children

Newsire - Special Election Update Series - November 8, 2000

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CER Newsire Special Election Update #1

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Election Results 2000 from the Center for Education Reform

Part I: The Day After

With those words now fully ingrained in our minds after several hours of watching and waiting for election returns, it's time to get specific about just what various results means for the fate of education reform:

Despite education topping the list of American voters, only a few races for political office are a reflection of public sentiment for or against:

- In Florida, the state commissioner of education's race was seen as a referendum on the [Florida A+ /school choice program](#), with former State Senator Charlie Crist running on that plan and winning by 54-44 over his opponent, who vowed to gut A+.
- In New Hampshire, Gordon Humphrey, the Republican challenger to Democratic Governor Jeanne Shaheen, was defeated, which is seen by many charter enthusiasts as a setback. In that state, [the modest charter law](#) has yet to produce a single charter school and Humphrey planned to strengthen the state's law.
- In both North Carolina and Missouri, Republican gubernatorial candidates had school choice as key components of their platforms. In NC, former Charlotte mayor Richard Vinroot lost to the state Attorney General Mike Easley and while Missouri may be subject to a recount, congressman Jim Talent, a reform proponent while on Capitol Hill was defeated by the State Treasurer Bob Holden.

Part II: Initiative and Referenda

Once again Americans show they are uncomfortable voting directly on any issue that would dramatically change the way schools do business. They are much more comfortable with increasing money and resources to schools, which as an issue may have little impact on how schools perform but sounds as American as apple pie. The more complex you get with voters, the more they turn a blind eye:

- The voucher defeats in Michigan and California are being played by the opponents as a rejection of school choice, but in reality, these defeats, added to those of the past, are yet another indication of the difficulties faced by reformers when challenging the status quo with its years of entrenchment and well-organized ground troops. For information on the Michigan proposal visit www.kidsfirstyes.org. For the California plan visit www.prop38yes.com. Labor dominated many states' outcomes this year, and school choice is no exception.
- Oregon's performance pay initiative was defeated for similar reasons. In the absence of a deeper understanding of what is causing schools to fail, the public is more likely to say no when in doubt than yes.
- The likely passage of California's proposition 39 and Arizona's 301 are a reflection of both more simplistic messages and bi-partisan coalitions in support. Prop. 39 lowers the threshold needed to pass a bond measure from two-thirds to 55% but equally important, requires school districts to make available adequate facilities for charter schools, which is the only thing standing in their way of more charter growth in the Golden State. AZ's prop. 301 approves a modest 6/10ths of a percent sales tax increase for schools combined with a requirement to publish achievement profiles on every school, and other accountability measures.
- A big disappointment is Washington state's initiative for charter schools. At "press time" it had failed by a slim margin (less than 42,000 votes), while the state's voters overwhelmingly passed money measures for teachers and class size. However, there are still as many as 10% of absentee ballots uncounted in the state, which could hold out one last hope for the charter supporters. Either way, they are not going away. For six years supporters of charters in Walla Walla land have been trying to bring about this modest reform measure. Interestingly, their leading opponents were the state's school administrator group and the state PTA. Perhaps with this 'victory' under their belt it's time to require them to deliver good schools to ALL children or move out of the way. For more on the initiative, visit www.WAcharterschools.org.
UPDATE: After the final ballot tally, the Washington Charter School Ballot Initiative was defeated.

Part III: Initial Reaction

Opponents of choice are saying (with glee) that these various reform failures show how much the American people reject issues like school choice. But while voters put education at the top of the list consistently in the polls, and when surveyed, support real education reform at significant levels, they apparently made their votes based on other considerations.

The reality is that the ballot initiative outcomes say little about whether or not school choice is embraced by the majority of Americans or whether it's a viable reform for the thousands of children

trapped in failing schools.

REVOLUTIONS BEGIN AT THE DINNER TABLE.

With no clear mandate at the national level and some of the closest margins of victory at the state and local level for all manner of candidates, education reform activists will continue taking their cause directly to the people, among whom rests the fate of the battles for better schools, equity and higher standards.

CER will be bringing you regular updates of election results and what the people around the country most affected by school reform are saying. Please keep an eye here for more information.



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