

Dear Friends:

Happy Spring! Fresh from thawing, we're delighted to bring you important data, respected opinions, and news from the front this issue. You'll see more than our usual stock of quotes and excerpts, and thus the astonishing similarities in tone and attitude that make this unusually diverse set of people, organizations, and ideas very much the united force for reform that is succeeding today.



Manufacturing Solutions

Many have covered the National Association of Manufacturers' endorsement of school choice and charter schools. Going hand-in-hand with the promotion of these reforms by one of the nation's leading business groups is a keen understanding of why these reforms are significant and how they will shape the future:

"The growing wave of charter schools and public schools of choice is **proving** the value of competition in strengthening school performance and student learning. The handful of communities that have begun experimenting with school vouchers are broadening that competition," says Anthony Carnevale for NAM's Manufacturing Institute in a booklet entitled *Education and Training for America's Future*. While falling short of endorsing national assessments, the report also said that "rigorous and meaningful tests benchmarked both nationally and internationally must be established to measure student performance...and should be used by employers and local school systems."

There are at least two NAM state affiliates which have been leading the charge for nearly all of the above-mentioned reforms for years. The Nevada and Pennsylvania Manufacturing Associations have been in the forefront of standards, and choice and charters, respectively, in their states. Provided with some focus from the national folks, other state leaders are likely to follow soon. If your state's affiliate is lagging, perhaps this is the opportunity to create a big push. Get a hold of the report. It's very much on point. Call (202) 637-3088 for a copy. Then contact your state affiliate to see how they're acting on it.

Sound It Out

It's not over 'til the Fat Lady sings... could be an appropriate title for the National Research Councils' efforts to bring an end to the "reading wars." NRC issued a report in late March which solidly endorses phonics in the early grades, and allows that whole language can be used productively with phonics instruction. But there are some leaders on both sides who aren't quite convinced. And the research has yet to be translated into practice; that is the job of a new National Reading Panel, to determine what kind of evidence should guide decisions over what kinds of reading programs should be administered. For phonics believers, the good news is that the NRC effort gives a solid-enough endorsement hopefully to end the temptation of whole-language purists to call you right-wing nuts. For everyone, the report simply repeats the common sense approach that most effective schools take anyway — identify your children's needs and use the methods that make the most sense, which should include a heavy concentration on the basics, as well as exposure to lots of reading materials. And this is the stuff war is made of?

Charter School Woes

- "It takes a carpenter to build a barn,' the legendary House Speaker Sam Rayburn used to say, 'but any jackass can kick one down.' Which would explain the recent braying and honking in Boston, where a herd of politicians have been stamping their hooves and snorting their disapproval of eight new charter schools that will be managed by - gasp! - private companies." (*The Boston Globe*, 3/5/98)

The *Globe's* Jeff Jacoby is referring to the Johnny-come-lately outrage over the recent awarding of charters to for-profit organizations, notwithstanding the fact that for-profits have been involved since the first charters opened in the **Massachusetts** in 1995. A Democrat who embodies his party's symbol, Marc Pacheco subsequently introduced a bill to curb such private involvement, apparently alarmed that any charter school would have for-profit companies engaged in the day to day business of running the school. Interestingly, this is the first year that school districts, and by extension teachers unions, can have direct chartering control; as a result, four Horace Mann charters have been locally approved. By contrast, eight Commonwealth charters have been approved by the state board of education to join the 25 already in operation. In testimony to the state board, Massachusetts Teachers Association President Stephen Gorrie attacked for-profits in the charter arena as "more motivated by making money than educating children," according to an NEA release. What's that saying about the pot and the kettle?

Concludes Jacoby: "What Pacheco says about education can be dismissed; it is propaganda from a union lackey.... Why do the jackasses kick so hard? Not for fear the charter schools might fail. For fear they will succeed."

- The Association of **North Carolina** Charter Schools has opened its doors both to serve charter operators and to help maintain and improve the strength of the existing law. Representatives of twenty-four of NC's first charters attended the Association's inaugural convention, where they heard from elected officials and elected officers. The hope and intent is that charter movement will grow and strengthen through the association's collaborative membership, especially with the addition of new members from among the state's thirty newly-approved charters.

One of the more promising charter proposals for the Tarheel state had to storm the bastille to get final approval. The Bear Grass Community Charter School had received preliminary approval from the state board earlier this year. It was later rescinded when Martin County officials bellyached that Bear Grass' 700 student enrollment (plus 200 wait-listed) would cause a 14% decrease in the district's enrollment. Parents and community residents raised Cain, and thankfully, Bear Grass will open, albeit a year after its founders had intended. Still, we wondered what Martin County's impact letter to the state board would have said with a drop of sodium pentothal:

Dear State Board:

Over 900 children have chosen to leave our school district to go to Bear Grass Charter. We haven't asked them why, nor do we want to know. We're just indignant because they are supposed to go to our schools, not a charter, and no one ever asked us permission for Bear Grass to open.

If you don't stop this nonsense, someone will lose his job. If you don't stop this nonsense, we may have to look for budget cuts, like our annual attendance to the NSBA, ASCD, AASA and ECS conferences that are always held in such pretty get-away spots. If you let these children go, we won't know how to explain it to the press. If you let them go, other parents may think something is wrong here. Then what will we do?

This is an election year, folks; please don't let this school open and show us all up! Some of us want to be Congressmen some day. We might even appoint you to some really neat commission!

Signed, Martin County School Board, Superintendent, three associate superintendents, four curriculum specialists, fifty-four administrative managers, the teacher's union, OOPS, I mean, association, the PTA and its officers, etc.

- "We simply do not believe that charter-school education is necessary," said Dwayne Slate, lobbyist for the Washington State School Directors Association. The public schools can do the job, he said." (*The Seattle Times*, 2/26/98)

Charter School Champions

- Some school districts are getting with the program. The **Baton Rouge, LA**-based *Advocate* reported last month that some innovative thinkers were surfacing within the system. "The public school system is looking for principals and teachers who want to experiment with new educational tactics in the form of district-run charter schools in the 1999-2000 school year. Don Mercer, associate superintendent...said the system is hoping for proposals from groups that include teachers, parents, community members and principals. 'The system is more interested in a group other than the board running the school,' he said... 'This is one way we can demonstrate... that we are serious about

trying to find creative ways to improve education for our children.”

- A similar ripple effect has been spotted in **Wake County, NC** where the superintendent wants to show that he can run a great charter school, too. The ripple started in Minnesota, went west across to California, and is criss-crossing the Mississippi as we speak. Look for more on the ripple effect in future issues. Don't, however, look for any sightings of the ripple effect in a new PACE study on the impact of charter schools. Author Eric Rofes asked a bunch of districts if they thought charters were making any positive waves. To no one's surprise, most said no. Imagine telling someone you despise or fear, however irrationally, that you changed just because they existed. Geeeee.

- “Good news! **San Luis Obispo, CA's** Bellevue-Santa Fe Charter will be in business, now that the school board unanimously reversed itself on the decision to revoke its charter if a state initiative to strengthen the charter law there makes it to the ballot. The renewal is still not perfect, leaving the charter with less money than all other children receive in the district. Asked how they'd get by with only \$3,100 per student, one charter rep. with a true grit spirit said, “We'll get there.” (Donations, I'm sure, are welcome, as they are at most worthwhile endeavors.)

(NB: One of the parent leaders in of Bellevue-Santa Fe Charter, in a recent Web posting before the decision, mentioned a conversation she had with her daughter that reminds us all what a real effect the politics of reform has on each and every person who tries to change the feeding pattern of a monster: “Coming home from yet another school-wide meeting at 9:30 pm the other night, my 7 year old daughter asked me ‘**Mommy, why do you want to tell everyone about what's happening at our school?**’ I replied ‘Because sometimes it's difficult for people to do the right thing on their own. Sometimes people need to know someone is watching in order to do what's right. I just want to let the district know lots of people are watching.’” Thanks, Donna, for watching, and for sacrificing so much of your time so things can be better for lots of children.)

A View from the Blob

- With the NEA PR machine working overtime to prove that they really mean business when they say the past isn't prologue and they're “on the reform wagon -- no really,” we're amused over the rhetorical approval it has given, suddenly, to programs like Success for All and Core Knowledge. A recent column by NEA prez Bob Chase showed just what pressure can do to a man: “Those who would have us believe that public education is ‘an ossified government monopoly’ incapable of change, ought to visit one of the many ‘turn-around’ schools across America.” So lemme see...big boy Bob and his fellow labor leaders barely even mentioned school reform until the heat went up in the kitchen. And now, he's biting the hand that feeds him his opening lines? That's gratitude for you!

- *Answer:* An NEA press release on a particular education reform effort reported that “Judy Schaubach, president of the Minnesota Education Association, said **such funds** divert much-needed attention from the 90 percent of students who attend public schools.”

Question: Was the MEA prez speaking about the “union dues or other fees that could be used for ‘political’ activity without first securing prior, written authorization from the union member or fee-payer,” a practice legislators at the state and national level are currently trying to abolish; or was she referring to the recent launch of the private KidsFirst Scholarship Fund program for low-income elementary students in St. Paul and Minneapolis? Sadly, you know the answer.

- From CER's research department: Objections from, among others, San Francisco superintendent Bill Rojas, led to the revision of a school board plan to mandate a racial quota of authors on the district's reading list. Instead, the board became the first in the nation to require books by diverse authors, including “transgendered” people, though without a specific quota of nonwhite authors. This is PC run amok. There is no concept of literary tradition or foundation in such a proposal. As the *San Francisco Examiner* put it, “Oppose the quota and be cast as a racist, or support it and earn a clownish reputation as being anti-Shakespeare.” Why don't they ask author Toni Morrison whom she read. Maybe the problem is that San Fran students are only required to read seven books each year to begin with.
- Regarding Ohio's (and other states') policies on teacher accreditation, an Ohio school board member writes us: “...there is no evidence that graduates of NCATE accredited schools are superior teachers...the National Education Association {that bastion of progressive thinking} is urging its local union to press for contracts which require all newly hired teachers be graduates of NCATE accredited schools.”
- Back to Bob: Mr. Chase wrote “a groundbreaking agreement between the Minneapolis school district and the local union **boldy** states: ‘All children need and deserve good schools. Some schools and some students will need more attention than others. Timely action must be taken to improve the district's lowest-performing schools. It is the union's responsibility to participate in the development of workable solutions — including, where necessary, starting all over again.’” This is **bold**? Is there a doctor in the house?!

SOMEONE GET THIS GUY A DOCTOR!

- From the Education Intelligence Agency, this juicy quote caught our attention: “When education is not public, we no longer have the ability to control what is taught and what is not taught,” Lee Berg, NEA official. Now that's more like the NEA we know and know.

Reform At-A-Glance

- Two professors at NY's State University at Stony Brook found that the years of hype over East Harlem District 4's **school choice success** is valid, due to the existence of choice itself, and was not a result of creaming, of more money, or other factors cited by people who get apoplexy when they say the word “choice.”
- Chicago schools next fall must transition students out of **bilingual classes** within three years under a newly approved school board policy. Meanwhile, California's state

board voted to eliminate the state's bilingual education mandate, and will thus no longer force schools to teach non-English speaking children in languages other than English. It will remain, however, an option of local schools, which is where the decision belongs.

- The times, they are a-changin'. *Education Week* reports that "**the tenured principal** [is] something of an endangered species in America's public schools." In the last few years, several states have nearly abolished it in law, and more state action is in the wings. For many practitioners, and certainly for schools and students, this is a good thing. The change from tenure to performance contracts for Georgia principals caused Ms. Gwendolyn Elmore of John Hope Elementary School to comment, "Everybody's very conscious of it. It definitely challenges you to do a better job and become more accountable for what you're doing." Teacher tenure, of course, remains a fixture, though most teachers have really begun to question the necessity of it. Presently tenure roll-back is under review in Florida, New Jersey and New York.

- More on the ripple effect. By now you're well aware of the exodus last fall of students from grades 1-6 at Giffen Memorial Elementary School, in the response to the launch of a **privately funded voucher program** targeting the bottom-ranking school's students. "We had two goals from the beginning," Tom Carroll, ABC's executive director, told a reporter, "One was to help give students a choice. And the other was to give the school district a kick in the pants."

The kick was felt. "It seemed to be the one factor that got the district to look at Giffen, and in that respect it was a good thing," said Anne Pope, the president of the Albany branch of the NAACP in the same article.

- "Why is an experiment....to be rejected merely because it may comprise what is new? [The American people] have not suffered a blind veneration for antiquity or custom...They reared the fabrics of government which have no model on the face of the globe." — **James Madison**, Federalist 14

Why indeed? We couldn't have said it better, even if we aren't dead, white or altogether male.

- Don't forget that **CER** is on the Web at <http://edreform.com> for all of your one-stop research and resource shopping. In fact, we just found out that we're ranked among the Lycos search engine's **TOP 5% Best of the Web** — "a selective directory of top-shelf sites rated by the Web's most experienced reviewers the very best the Web has to offer." Lycos says our site is "equally useful to those dipping their toes into the reform pool and those who have been soaking for years. While thinking globally, this site empowers you to act locally through its educator network in your neck of the woods." CNN recently reported that there are over 320 million web pages on the net — but you only need to know one. Go ahead, take the plunge.

Now, This is a Test, III

Our exam-nostalgia club is growing, thanks to friends around the globe. A

sample of another 100-year old test, this one a final exam from the eighth grade. There are five subjects altogether; students were given just over five hours to complete it (without Ritalin). The time: 1895, The place: Salina, KS. The questions:

Grammar:

Give nine rules for the use of Capital Letters. • Name the Parts of Speech and define those that have no modifications. • Define verse, stanza and paragraph.

Arithmetic

A wagon box is 2ft. deep, 10 ft. long, and 3 ft. wide. How many bushels of wheat will it hold? (Note: calculators weren't invented yet!) • District No. 33 has a valuation of \$35,000. What is the necessary levy to carry on a school seven months at \$50 per month, and have \$104 for incidentals? (*Try giving that one to your own school board!*) • Find back discount on \$300 for 90 days (no grace) at 10 percent.

U.S. History

Give an account of the discovery of America by Columbus. • Relate the causes and results of the Revolutionary War. • Tell what you can of the history of Kansas. • Who were the following: Morse, Whitney, Fulton, Bell, Lincoln, Penn, Howe?

Geography

What is climate? Upon what does climate depend? • Describe the mountains of North America. • Name all the republics of Europe and give capitals of each. • Describe the process by which the water of the ocean returns to the sources of rivers.

And Speaking of Tests

To celebrate last year's TIMSS results showing that United States fourth graders are among the best in the world in math and science, President Clinton et al. gathered in the Rose Garden to hear Secretary of Education Richard Riley declare, "We are turning the corner." But, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* points out (3/3/98), "Someone should have put some brakes on the euphoria that day. International comparisons have always shown the United States doing well in the early grades. (How much math does anyone know in the fourth grade, anyway?) These results mainly show that our kids are not congenitally stupid. Now, however, the results for 12th graders are out from the same testing effort — the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) — and it's time to rain on the parade."

The TIMSS scores demonstrate one very sobering fact; the longer US children stay in school, the more poorly they perform. US 12th graders — even advanced ones — rank 19th and 16th, respectively, among 21 countries in math and science.

Of course, Don't Worry Be Happy award winner Gerald Bracey knows better. In a diatribe to a *Washington Post* reporter (3/26/98) arguing that the recent TIMSS scores don't matter, Bracey chided, "Do you really think these Greek kids suddenly encountered Socratic teachers in their high schools and shot their advanced students beyond ours? In a pig's eye!"

But Bracey's real motives are apparent in his first annual...ahem...report, circa fall 1991: "In the U.S., we avoid discussing the implications of overeducation because we fear that we may reach conclusions that clash with our ideal of equal opportunity for all. But until everyone owns a humanoid robot, as well as a car and a color television, some person will have to do the 'dirty jobs.' Until then, however loath we are to admit it, we must continue to produce an uneducated social class..."

Maybe next time some reputable journalist wants to use Bracey's questionable information for a column or article, they'll check out from whence this guy speaks.



Hey all you Governors! Before you spend all those surpluses on traditional education programs, put down that pen and wait for our "Top Ten Ways to Spend Your Surpluses" issue coming next month! Also in May, some near final notes on legislative reform efforts, and more from the trenches.

And if you'd just rather skip the whole policy thing, play your hand at our song trivia game. First one to drop us a note on our Web site telling us the title of the song, author, singer, and date will be our guest at CER's Fall Anniversary Dinner, October 27 in Washington, DC:

"So, keep on looking for a blue bird, and listening for its song..."

Jeanne Allen