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**MONTHLY LETTER TO FRIENDS OF
THE CENTER FOR EDUCATION REFORM
No. 84**

APRIL, 2004

Dear Friends:

Spring has finally sprung, and so it seems that students are not the only ones with spring fever! In fact, some hot heads are delivering quite a number of anti-reform sentiments in word and deed, from national politics to the local scene. So while our children all seem to be getting itchy to make important transitions, some grown-ups — as usual — have a hard time focussing on what counts. We return to our traditional MONTHLY LETTER (chock full of real issues of concern) to help them out a bit.

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Go Charter U!

Since 2004 started, I've had the honor of making all-too-brief visits to great schools that strive to instill the drive to attend college in inner city youngsters. The charter schools I visited are engaged directly in making higher education a reality for all of their children, regardless of what their deficiency when they arrive. From papering the names of major universities in halls and on doors, to making the very idea of college part of the atmosphere and development of every student, these schools show students how to dream. The educators that lead them show all of us what can happen when great school leaders aim to meet ambitious goals.

Along the Mississippi lies **University Academy**, a school imagined and supported by civic leaders that took shape with a partnership between a career educator, Dr. Patricia Henley, and the University of Missouri at Kansas City. It's hard to believe, looking at this bustling school of 300 6th-12th graders, that you're in a city where more than 80 percent of traditional public school students *lack* proficiency, despite large, expensive, and well-intentioned efforts. University Academy focuses on making sure students set high goals and works to bring them up to grade level, as most arrive several pegs below. One unique approach is to separate girls and boys for all of their courses in 6th grade and for some subjects in 7th grade. Research into the genders and how they learn underscores the approach Henley is taking with these volatile ages. A local City Councilman doubles as a part-time civics teacher. A successful businessman is teaching a rigorous math program using the Saxon program. The art teachers are from the University as well, and have set up a studio that has drawn out incredible talent among the students, with an eye not only to expression but a lesson in techniques that mirror advanced classes in higher education. The science lab benefits from the instruction of an actual scientist. And the University is piloting a new remediation program that is integrated into the day and allows students to work at their own pace to advance to successive achievement levels.

It's no surprise with this kind of package (made possible by having enormous flexibility to operate) that the school scored above state and national averages on achievement tests. The Board has broken ground to build a new school building on a new site so that by 2005, the University Academy will be able to accommodate 1,000 children in grades K-12.

University Academy is one of those schools that proves the point that laws matter. Missouri's charter law is well-regarded and invites the kind of quality apparent in this institution. Kansas City charter school enrollment is nearly 20% of total public school enrollment, the envy of many cities.

Way out west of the Mississippi, San Jose, CA is fast becoming the charter hub of California's Bay area, right smack in Silicon Valley. There stands **Downtown College Prep (DCP)**, the brainchild of teacher Jennifer Andaluz, who was previously a teacher and professional development coordinator for urban high schools in San Jose. Like its Midwest neighbor, DCP strives to make sure college is within the reach of every student who walks through its doors. With 340 students in grades 9-12, DCP is such a prize that it recently attracted the National League of Cities for a tour on its recent trip out west. San Jose Mayor Ron Gonzales is a huge fan of the school and recognizes the power of good schools to affect positive economic development and to bring families back to cities. He is committed to making similar schools a reality across the city.

DCP offers its students a bright and ambitious environment: graduates of DCP are prepared to thrive at a four-year college or university. Most of its students are the first in their families to go to college. Seventy percent qualify for free or reduced-lunch, and 68 percent enter reading and computing between the 3rd and 5th grade level.

Undeterred, principal Andaluz has assembled a team that as of February, made sure that every graduating student had already visited 10 colleges to help them apply (the designated college room boasts pictures and maps of where the first 42 percent had already been accepted). AP Calculus had been mastered by 25 percent of seniors and 86 percent of seniors had already passed Math and English exit exams.

The community loves Downtown College Prep. Leading civic, parent and civil right activists are working hard to keep this good thing going and to bring more to the area. A new KIPP charter is opening this month in nearby Alum Rock.

If you are in either city, stop by and visit, and give a cheer for these great charter schools! (You can visit **Downtown College Prep** on line at downtowncollegeprep.org and for more information on **University Academy**, call 816-235-5657.)

On Charters

- Persistence Pays! **Washington State F-I-N-A-L-L-Y** passed a charter law, eight years in the making and the loudest cheers came from Representative Dave Quall, Senator Steve Johnson and grassroots leaders, Fawn and Jim Spady, who have all worked like Job to make it happen. In brief, it's only a modest bill, but one that will jump-start the movement there: six schools each year, school board only approval but an appeal to the state is possible. A conference will be underway for prospective applicants by the time you read this but for more info, go to www.wacharterschools.org.
- **California's** legislature is actually moving quickly on a bill to add institutions of higher education as authorizers for charters. This bill, co-authored by Republican Assemblywoman Patricia Bates and Democratic Senator Dede Alpert, would add public universities to the list of authorizers that can approve and manage the independent public schools. A hearing in March turned out the usual suspects on both sides, but the chances for passage are good. With school boards continuing to demonstrate hostilities to charters (and often getting support from the state education department to do so), this would be a refreshing and productive option for children in the Golden State.
- Laws Matter! Adding universities to the menu of authorizers in a state not only strengthens the law, but **helps student achievement**. Important new research finds that the strength of a law — that is clearly defined with specific criteria and widely recognized — has everything to do with whether or not a state has a significant number of quality schools. That's right — great charter schools and/or great achievement tend to be concentrated in states that permit more than one authorizer and lots of flexibility and autonomy. Almost all of those states with strong charter laws saw significant gains in student achievement and test results in the last two years. There is a wealth of data on this topic in CER's [Charter School Laws Across the States](#). To get your copy, log onto CER's website at www.edreform.com.
- Bipartisan support for charter growth can be found in the Bay State, too. There, Democratic Senator Robert Antonioni and Representative Mari St. Fleur have teamed up with Republican Governor Mitt Romney to challenge a bevy of bills. These bills are aimed at putting a moratorium on the **Massachusetts** charter school growth and have been referred to "study," more or less guaranteeing their demise, until at least next session. The Charter Association there can give you the play by play. Go to www.masscharterschools.org.
- People from the Live Free or Die State have finally moved closer to having, well, a real live charter law. That's because the legislature relaxed the onerous application process last year to allow the state board to become part of the process to approve charters. Now, **New Hampshire** will see four schools open next year and another 15 are waiting in the wings. The charter law there passed in 1995 but because the local board had to dictate how and when schools would open — twice in the process — none did. Now they are free, and the children who will benefit are some of the state's neediest. The new schools that will open target, respectively, autistic children, the hearing impaired, traditionalists and arts fans. For more info, call Sue Hollins, grande dame of New Hampshire reform, at 603-643-6115.

A View from the Blob (*It really is!*)

Payback: Wisconsin Governor Jim Doyle not only vetoed a positive amendment to the state's charter law, but true to his word to the unions, Doyle added strings to the Milwaukee choice program to help the state ensure "accountability" among private schools that participate in its 11 year old voucher program. Thanks to Doyle, the union can now expect that Milwaukee's private schools will be shackled to the same bureaucratic regulations as traditional public schools.

Partisanship: The AFT has taken off the gloves early in backing John Kerry for president. Running an admittedly "parallel" campaign, the AFT is funneling soft money into a group called America Votes, that is running ads and programs on Kerry's behalf. NEA needs the formal endorsement of its members to follow suit, but that has not stopped that union from spending its member money on a similar effort.

Public Relations: NEA president Reg Weaver's new radio ads are so compelling about putting children first that you'd think that the NEA had become child-centered! In reality, the radio ads could easily be considered an in-kind contribution to the cause to end No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Weaver says his group is not against NCLB. No, they believe in standards. What they are against are uniform standards, in all states, for all children. We guess that the NEA prefers the days when a school's standards were dependent not on science, but on subjectivity, and when schools were not expected to account for quality. As the money for these ads runs out, the NEA is starting to "request" a dollar per member to pay for the anti-NCLB campaign, and other political activities. NEA calls its political effort America Learns. We call it *America Duped*.

Paige Responds: Contrary to some reports, there is much flexibility built into *No Child Left Behind*. "This is not a 'one size fits all' law. There are important provisions that allow state and local governments to shift other federal education money to meet their particular needs at the local level," says Education Secretary Rod Paige, who in various commentaries over the past few weeks, challenged NCLB critics convincingly. Of course, the money that the feds have to spend on PR is a fraction of what the unions do, so you may not hear the message as often.

Press Responds: *The New York Times* noted NCLB as being the punching bag of the various primary candidates, and to the editorial board's credit on March 2, said the new law, while needing tinkering here and there, is generally on track. "Congress will need to fight off destructive schemes by lobbyists and bureaucrats of both parties who are working hard to undermine [it] and to preserve the bad old status quo...Democratic legislators are also fearful of the [NEA], the... most powerful teacher's union...which has a history of vigorously resisting standards-based change and is dead set against making teachers subject to federally dictated qualification and performance standards."

Proxy Vote: The former president of the Florida Education Association is running for School Board in Broward County, Florida. According to the Education Intelligence Agency and local sources, she is glossing over her partisan battles with Governor Bush and her opposition to his A+ plan. EIA reported in 1999 that Ms. Maureen Dinnen is an unlikely reformer: "Bush and the Legislature are no more interested in fairness for education than President Milosevic is interested in fairness for the Kosovar Albanians."

A Sad Day in Buffalo: Like taking candy from a baby, the decision to deny five young violinists an opportunity to play their music at a district-wide competition in Buffalo was heartless. Never mind that the King Charter School, which those five attend, is one of the city's best public schools. Never mind that the Buffalo school board has endorsed heartily the growth of more charters, recognizing that the city needs better schools to restore the social and economic health of the region. No, the petty arguments and fighting caused by the union and their blob brethren are apparently considered more important than the social fabric good schools can knit.

"It's really pretty sad that they spend so much time focusing on how to hurt charter schools, and by extension the kids who go to them," said Bill Phillips of the New York Charter Schools Association, to the *Associated Press*. 'Imagine how great it would be if they spend that energy creating schools that parents would want to keep their kids in.'"

According to the same news article, pettiness abounds: "...In Buffalo, the teachers' and the administrators' unions refused to participate in an annual fund-raiser because charter schools would participate.

"The state Education Department has had to enlist the state Comptroller's Office to deduct per pupil aid from several districts statewide that refused to transfer their state aid to charter schools.

"In Schenectady, charter school parents said district officials have called and written to them urging them to leave charter schools.

"In Albany, school administrators and teachers from around the state have held press conferences to blame charter schools as a main cause for local tax increases."

Evergreen Sour Grapes: Washington state's union was so outraged it couldn't stop this year's bill that its leaders immediately set about collecting signatures for a ballot-box repeal of the law. Three cheers for *The Seattle Times*, which wrote: "Leave Charters Alone...Surely the union has more important work to do."

True Colors: Was PBS showing its true colors in a recent hatchet job on Education Department support of myriad choice-friendly education groups? Bill Moyers based an entire twenty-minute segment on an incredibly subjective and distorted People for the American Way report as if it were news. PFAW was outraged that the grants totaling \$77 million were given to a variety of groups to educate parents, policymakers and teachers about a variety of programs that support alternate certification programs or choices for parents. Such programs are a reality today but you can't expect the PTA to tell parents about their rights under No Child Left Behind any more than you can expect the NEA to tell teachers they don't have to be members of a union. Bill Moyers, pretending to be objective, hails from the War on Poverty during Lyndon Johnson days. Naturally, you would think he would warm to the idea that government should fund good education programs. No— not in this case. Apparently the billions of federal dollars that have subsidized the Blob for years is not a scandal, even when those dollars result in no educational achievement, but money to tell parents and teachers about other opportunities available to them is. I guess equal time rules no longer apply.

From the Trenches

- If the NEA's Reg Weaver had his way, **Michigan** parents at 120 schools that received a failing grade would never know their school was in such dire straits. These schools didn't just have overnight problems. They failed to meet state and federal benchmarks for five straight years, which means they were failing before NCLB got a hold of them. So what happens to these schools? The law says they have a year to shut down and reopen as a charter, replace staff, turn over their management to the state or another group, or they can entirely restructure the school's governance, according to various sources. In Hamtramck, MI, the leadership admits the problem. "We are shirking our responsibility in educating our children," says school board president, Camille Colatosti. What a refreshing attitude! Rather than fight it, she is working to rebuild.
- Choice reaches **Washington, DC!** The Nation's Capital is now home to the fifth publicly and popularly supported scholarship program to aid needy children in failing schools. Last month, the Education Department announced that the Washington Scholarship Foundation (WSF) is the administrator for the program which can serve up to 2,000 children. WSF has long administered private scholarships and is no stranger to the program. The establishment has been yelling and yipping, "the end is near;" but in reality, thousands of parents have already contacted Virginia Walden-Ford's DC Parents for School Choice asking when they can apply. As Cherry Blossoms abound there is no brighter time for children here in our backyard, who now have more choices and a greater chance for better schools, be they private, public or charter.
- A veteran of present day Iraq's war came home to his job as a representative in **Florida** and promptly introduced a bill to allow choice to thousands of children whose parents served in the military. Representative Carey Baker says he wanted to do something for veterans. The House-passed measure would provide a transportation voucher to parents wanting to transfer children out of their district, or a \$3,600 voucher to attend private school. As many as 300,000 students are probably eligible. And with the sacrifices their parents face, they probably deserve it more than a lot of us.
- Did you hear the Secretary's comment about the NEA being a terrorist organization? It was attacked by people on all sides, and the union milked it for everything it was worth, and not surprisingly, used a meeting the secretary was gracious enough to have with teachers to magnify the comment and attract press attention. One teacher who came to town reportedly cried because the comment made her feel so bad because she is from New York. This is a little hard to take — Paige calls the union "terrorist" (which he admits was a mistake) and that provokes weeping? Can we maybe weep for the kids who can't even read? As highlighted earlier, the *New York Times*, in addressing NCLB criticisms, opined that the NEA is a huge problem:

"While Mr. Paige made an egregious error in referring to the union as a 'terrorist organization,' the NEA has not served the cause of quality education well in this fight, particularly when it attempts to turn suburban parents against the new law."

• **Single-sex** private schools have always been in high demand among more affluent Americans who can afford to be choosy. In recent years, charter school operators have taken advantage of freedom from regulation to start their own single sex schools, but have been required to make certain accommodations to both sexes to avoid skirting the law. Under proposed federal regulations, single sex public schools that strive to provide options to families may soon have a green light. By amending Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Secretary Paige has proposed that school districts be able to offer single-sex public schools as a viable option for students. Coupled with new flexibility under No Child Left Behind, districts can start such schools as long as they ensure that opportunities are equal for both sexes. Final word on the amendments will come later in April.

• Just in time for spring! Brighten up your wardrobe of reference materials with the CER's fresh new **National Charter School Directory 2004**. Completely updated and listing all of America's nearly 3,000 charter schools, this ninth edition of one of CER's flagship publications is a must-have for the fashion conscious. The Directory provides complete contact information, enrollment data, descriptions of the schools' programs and curricula, lists of schools that have been approved but are not yet open, specialty schools (including vocational schools, cyber and virtual schools, arts-based and special-needs schools, etc.) and state maps plotting school locations. All for the same low price as last year's stylish edition – just \$69.95! Order one for yourself and several for your friends. Write to us, call 1-800-521-2118 or e-mail cer@edreform.com You can also place your order online at www.edreform.com. We take credit cards! Add a donation and really make your day bright!

• **Creaming in teacher certification group?** That's what the recent report about the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) looks like. A study done by the Urban Institute evaluated the progress made by students in North Carolina. It says the achievement levels are higher among students taught by National Board teachers. The NBPTS is the group started in the late-80s and federal funding has grown to more than \$119 million annually. It claimed to be the answer to how to reward and retain quality teachers. But as many on both sides of the debate point out, student performance is not a precondition for "master" certification. The pundits supporting this expensive certification process (teachers and states also pay, as do some foundations) say it motivates teachers. And there's no doubt that earnest teachers are applying. But the facts bear out that the teachers getting Board certified are actually among the better teachers anyway. So the award and the pat on the back might keep them charging hard, but is it doing anything to ensure high quality instruction and incentives for new teachers? Check out the American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence (www.abcte.org) or the Teacher Advancement Program (www.mff.org/tap) for some more meaty programs that work.

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Let us hear from you about developments in your area. We know there is tons more going on out there than we can cover. We relish your stories and feedback. From all of us at CER, Happy Spring!

Jeanne
Jeanne Allen

It's time for everyone who cares about reform to start making their vote really count on education reform. If you want to get the pulse of a candidate on the education issues most important to you, use CER's Candidate Survey and not only be equipped to make good voting decisions, but be a part of the effort to keep education reform issues moving from the Statehouse to the White House. With this brief survey, you may get your candidates' perspective on a wide range of education issues and use the responses to inform others about the candidate of your choice. Through your involvement, you can make a real difference for parents and for the education of America's children.

THE CENTER FOR EDUCATION REFORM

CANDIDATE SURVEY 2004

- 1) WHAT ARE YOUR THREE OVERALL EDUCATION PRIORITIES THAT, IN A PERFECT WORLD, YOU WOULD ACCOMPLISH DURING YOUR TENURE IN OFFICE. HOW WILL YOU GO ABOUT ACHIEVING THEM? WHY ARE THESE THE MOST IMPORTANT PRIORITIES?
- 2) IN ORDER OF PRIORITY, WHAT SHOULD POLICYMAKERS BE MOST CONCERNED ABOUT IN SCHOOLS?
 CURRICULUM STANDARDS (I.E. READING, MATH, AND OTHER CORE SUBJECTS)
 CONSTRUCTION
 CLASS SIZE
 TEACHER QUALITY
 ACCOUNTABILITY/STRONG TESTING PROGRAM
 SCHOOL CHOICE (CHARTER SCHOOLS, SCHOLARSHIPS, ETC.)
- 3) WHAT ROLE DOES MONEY PLAY IN IMPROVING SCHOOLS?
PLEASE EXPLAIN YOUR ANSWER.
- 4) WHAT ROLE SHOULD PARENTS PLAY IN THE EDUCATION PROCESS? HOW MUCH CONTROL DO YOU BELIEVE PARENTS SHOULD HAVE OVER WHICH PROGRAMS OR SCHOOLS THEIR CHILD IS ENROLLED IN?
- 5) DO YOU SUPPORT CHARTER SCHOOLS? IF YES, PLEASE LIST ANYTHING YOU WOULD DO TO SUPPORT THEM.
- 6) DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE THAT THE FEDERAL NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT IS GOOD POLICY? PLEASE EXPLAIN YOUR ANSWER.
- 7) FOUR STATES AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA NOW FUND SCHOOL CHOICE PROGRAMS FOR PARENTS WHOSE CHILDREN ARE AT RISK OR IN FAILING SCHOOLS. DO YOU SUPPORT SUCH PROGRAMS? IF SO, WOULD YOU PUSH A SIMILAR PROGRAM IN YOUR AREA?
- 8) DO YOU SUPPORT OPENING PUBLIC SCHOOL CLASSROOMS TO WELL-EDUCATED PEOPLE FROM OTHER CAREERS AND GIVING THEM A FAST-TRACK ROUTE TO BECOMING QUALIFIED TEACHERS?
- 9) DO YOU AGREE WITH THE POSITION OF MANY TEACHER UNIONS AND OTHERS IN THE EDUCATION BUREAUCRACY THAT THE PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM IS HEALTHY AS IT IS? HAVE YOU ACCEPTED OR RECEIVED SUPPORT AND/OR ENDORSEMENTS FROM ANY OF THESE GROUPS OR LIKE ORGANIZATIONS?
- 10) IF YOU COULD DICTATE ONE AREA WHERE YOU WOULD SPEND BILL GATES' MONEY FOR EDUCATION, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

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PLEASE RETURN THIS COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRE TO:

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