



1001 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Suite 920 • Washington, DC 20036

Tel 202-822-9000
Fax 202-822-5077

**MONTHLY LETTER TO FRIENDS OF
THE CENTER FOR EDUCATION REFORM
NO. 9**

SEPTEMBER 1, 1994

Dear Friends:

Happy September! America's going back to school and we're celebrating our first birthday. We're delighted to kick it off with the feature in *Family Life* which you should have received by now. We're working with the editors there on shaping stories on both private contracting and charter schools. More on these and other issues follows.



From the States

- The Superintendent's race in California has been virtually void of any substantive issues -- until just recently when Pacific Research Institute weighed in with a prescribed *Common Sense Agenda for California's New State Superintendent for Public Instruction*. The ten-point agenda includes expanding the pool of those who can petition for charter schools, eliminating ineffective programs and state bureaucrats, revamping the controversial CLAS test and stripping the unions of their monopoly bargaining power. PRI's presentation and release of this new agenda is right on target. In fact, word is that Governor Wilson himself has handed it to the more palatable candidate of the two running, Maureen DiMarco. This is a must acquisition for anyone involved in reform, and a great model if your state is faced with a similar race. For more information, contact PRI at (415) 989-0833.
- You may know the exciting news by now that the Puerto Rico Supreme Court has allowed the commonwealth's choice program to continue into the second year, while it mulls over the constitutional issues raised by the ACLU et al's lawsuit against the program. The choice program there allows low-income children to attend the public, private or parochial school of their choice, within a \$10 million spending cap. The feedback has been tremendous from the nearly 2,000 families choosing. The program's continuation is great news for the kids, and as the Institute for Justice argues, bodes well for the five on the court who believe the program is obviously

beneficial, at least to some degree. Speaking of legality, you'll find enclosed the IJ's recent paper on choice, entitled *SCHOOL CHOICE: Answers to the Most Frequently Asked Questions*, which will prove to be an enormously useful document on legal concerns.

Charter Gains

- A great analysis on the year's progress in charter schools comes courtesy of Minnesota's Ted Kolderie: "With six more states enacting laws in 1993 the charter idea became in 1994 a major focus of interest in the debate about how to change and improve American public education. What had been a discussion within individual states became a national discussion...The legislative base continued to develop. Two new laws were enacted (in Kansas and in Arizona) and existing laws were improved. And the laws began to be implemented. Proposals for schools appeared, from teachers and others. Some were bitterly resisted. Some were approved; some were rejected. Gradually schools began operating. A structure of support-organizations appeared, to help them." With ten states in a position to authorize charters now, we're hopeful that 94-95 will bring even more success stories in autonomous public schools. Among the states set to consider charter legislation in the next term after the elections, we'll be watching Connecticut, Florida, South Carolina and Texas most closely.
- Some charter enthusiasts are thrilled with Minnesota's Senator Dave Durenberg's success in getting \$15 million in start-up funds authorized in the Senate's version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The House contains a similar, although more limited provision.
- Despite roadblocks, the Charter School Chronicle this month reported that a number of schools are making substantial progress toward opening. For example, Los Angeles school officials made it a condition of approval for the teachers starting the new Accelerated School that they raise \$200,000. By June, they had raised \$237,000, thanks to Wells Fargo Bank primarily, and the Weingart Foundation. And kudos to the First Interstate Bank of California Foundation, which donated \$13,000 to two San Diego charter schools to help them with necessary start-up costs.
- Food for thought: Charter Schools are definitely an area where businesses can make a substantive contribution to lasting education reform. The Business Roundtables and Chambers of Commerce in the various charter states should be on everyone's list of groups to keep abreast about the progress of charters. So far, California, Michigan and Arizona have connected well with their respective business coalitions. This is a good model for states and business leaders.

- Charter organizers are among the more creative educators. While the Boston-based City on a Hill won't formally open until the fall, this summer it provided a community-service based summer school for 48 youngsters. As the founders struggled with setting up their school, residents of the inner city were taught math, science, government and civics, all made possible from local, private donations.
- While Texas is one of 4 or 5 states slated to consider charter school legislation after the elections, Dallas School Superintendent Chad Woolery is already proposing to restructure several low-performing schools around a charter type of model.

Charter Woes

- Elsewhere, struggles abound. California teachers in L.A., for example, recently found out they were dropped from the health benefit rolls. Teachers going to work for charter schools are supposed to be listed as "on leave" but maintain their benefit status. The official word is that it is a bureaucratic snafu. Hmmmmm. It is games like this one that is putting a bigger and less impenetrable wedge between teachers and their unions. Says Vaughn Next Century Learning Center teacher Carol Haasis, "I'm tired of feeling as if we were a step-child of the district. I would like to feel as if our union represents us."

On Standards

- Boston's most read paper, the *Globe*, turned its editorial pages to education this summer, reflecting on Brown vs. Board twenty years later and today's trends in reform. Stunningly, the *Globe* had this to say about standards and accountability:

"The time has come to end the debate about whether students should be given high achievement standards or whether these might cause students to fail, lowering self-esteem. **We believe in setting the bar as high as reasonably possible** (emphasis added). High expectations for achievement will lead to high self-esteem.

"The school system today is a Skinner's Box of bureaucratic rules and rewards. Teachers and principals must be given more freedom...privately operated charter schools offer the flexibility teachers and administrators crave."

On Autonomy

- The administrators in Los Angeles have something to learn from that. In the wake of that county implementing its new public school choice

program, one school was put in its place by the district when it tried to be innovative. According to the *LA Times*, this school decided "it needed a newsletter," to involve parents more. A teacher volunteered to type it. Before they knew it, the central administrative offices got wind of this little extra bit of effort, and the teacher got a memo telling her that "only "classified personnel" (secretaries and others) could" type. Even the *LA Times* concedes the folly of bureaucracy: "The district must become less a slave to rules and more an advocate for allowing a school do what makes sense for that campus...nothing in this setup encourages the kind of systemic change and local school control that is regularly responsive to student and parent needs."

The Animal Fair

- There's an old children's song that starts out with "We went to the animal fair..." It has been in mind since some of our people returned from the NEA and National School Boards Association conventions this summer. While some attention was given to what happens at these and other annual occurrences each year, our first hand look at their operations reveals some truly amazing stories. We're seeking publication of some of them, but one anecdote from the NEA convention really stands out: during the main floor discussion of new business items, the NEA delegates took to fund-raising for their favorite causes. One young man removed his shirt, and auctioned it off for hundreds of dollars. The proceeds went to the NEA-PAC.
- Perhaps less exciting but nonetheless meaningful, the NEA approved \$1.6 million in spending to fight local battles such as various school choice and private contracting measures, and to "ward off conservative critics." An additional \$1.5 million was added to its contingency fund to support state efforts against choice. From its current budget, \$500,000 is going to Michigan to fight Governor Engler re-election, and \$250,000 is going to New Jersey to fight the Jersey City choice proposal.

Shouldn't we inform the dedicated teachers who host bake sales and other benefits that this kind of money exists which could be used perhaps for the chalk, materials and textbooks that so many teachers claim are lacking from the poorer schools?

Union Diatribes

Anyone who communicates with other reformers or their membership should continue to harp on the unions' real motives in education. Both NEA and AFT this summer at their conventions voted resolutions strongly against or at the very least requiring controls over any negotiations in their districts with private vendors. Yet the national leaders are forever telling the public that their locals are permitted fierce

independence in decisions affecting them personally. Oh, what a tangled web we weave!

The AFT, incidentally filed a lawsuit against Hartford, CT to block Education Alternatives Inc. from their contract to manage the 32 schools there.

Speaking of Private Contracting...

- MacNeil-Lehrer is doing a twenty-minute piece in the near future on this whole debate, that from our vantage point, will be a fair discussion of the issues. We'll let you know when.
- And schools continue to contract with private firms. Most recently, Trenton, NJ contracted with Edison to run an elementary school, as did Hawaii and Kansas. EAI and Edison both are courting several districts in New Jersey, particularly their most beleaguered.

Back in Washington

On Goals 2000: It's always amusing to catch the blob in a bald-faced lie; at least it would be, if it wasn't so dangerous for American children.

You may recall that throughout the discussions about Clinton's Goals 2000, the Administration continued to deny that opportunity-to-learn standards would have any mandating effects on our schools, arguing instead that those OTL standards were strictly voluntary. This satisfied some concerned groups such as the National Governors Association, and the case was then closed, with these input standards adopted in Goals 2000 and now codified in current proposals reauthorizing elementary and secondary education programs.

Now that Goals 2000 is law, the education groups are stepping forward to begin the process of defining allegedly voluntary OTL standards. According to *Education Week*, "representatives of 16 education groups agreed to draft a statement of key elements of opportunity-to-learn standards and a proposal for funding to develop modern NATIONAL standards under Goals 2000." In other words, what these groups define will become the national standard, and Goals 2000 will fund their efforts to draft such standards. How cozy. All this for a voluntary effort? Somehow, we doubt it.

Good Wisdom:

"Schools ought to be controlled at the local level, not by the bureaucracy in Jackson. The education bureaucracy is the biggest bureaucracy in the world." Mississippi Governor Kirk Fordice.

Back to School Stats

- As we went to press, two important reports were being issued. The New York-based College Board, administrator of the SATs, released the 1994 average scores for states and the nation. The average verbal score was down one point overall, to 423 while the average math score was up one point overall, to 479. Ten years ago, the average verbal score was 426, and the average math score was 471. Clearly, achievement as indicated by the SAT has been stagnant, at best. Of course, next year, it won't matter what the average score is because the College Board says it should be 500, and is recentering scores to reflect that artificial median point, to supposedly make students understand better their scores. (We weren't aware that any of them were confused!). Approximately 42% of all high school graduates took the SATs in 1994. Interestingly, most of these kids are college bound. One wonders what the scores of the remaining 58% of high school graduates would look like, given what we know about their achievement. American College Testing (ACT) scores have also made very slight gains, with the average score rising from 20.7 to 20.8 on a scale from 1 to 36. Please see our enclosed paper on *The American Education Diet: Can U.S. Students Survive on Junk Food?* for more information on U.S. student achievement.

- Also hot-off-the-press is the annual *Phi Delta Kappan* Gallup poll of Americans' attitudes toward education. We'll be taking a closer look at these results next month, but in the meantime, if you'd like a copy, please call our office.

And Finally,

Congratulations and welcome back to Fritz Steiger formally of the Texas Public Policy Foundation, who is now spearheading a new national effort aimed at growing and promoting private scholarship programs. CEO AMERICA was just launched and will be helping with technical assistance and providing matching grants to new programs. Call Fritz at (501) 273-6957.

The Competitive Enterprise Institute, has issued a handy guide to the Internet and other electronic boards entitled *The Virtual Hand.: 'CEIs Free-Market Guide to the Information Superhighway.* This can help anyone searching for a last minute answer, quote, or other such data on issues from healthcare to education. You can obtain this book by calling the CEI at (202) 331-1010.

September promises to be busy for all. We'll be in touch,

