



OCCASIONAL LETTER TO FRIENDS 2021 *THANKSGIVING EDITION*

Dear Friends,

If you're reading this **Occasional Letter to Friends**, thank you! This Fall has been an incredibly busy time with multiple initiatives in the continued fight for advancing opportunity, innovation, freedom and flexibility for all learners, regardless of zip code.

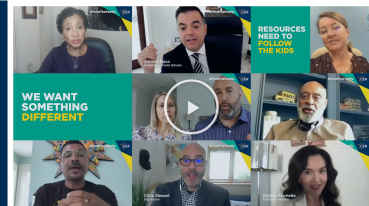
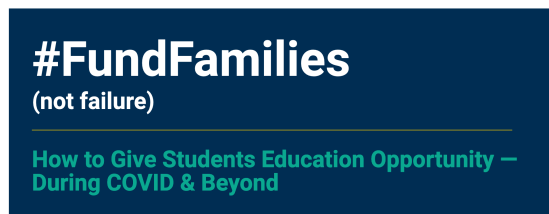
It's been **28 years since CER first began** its relentless focus on excellence in education for all students, but the last 19 months has crystallized in a short period of time for millions more Americans why it's missing for most, and why it's necessary.

WHERE WE ARE TODAY

Parents, policy makers, educators and entrepreneurs across the globe are engaged like never before, and we have used every tool at our disposal to galvanize them since the pandemic hit. Within days last year we rallied the innovators who didn't skip a beat to tell their story, set up an “essential database”

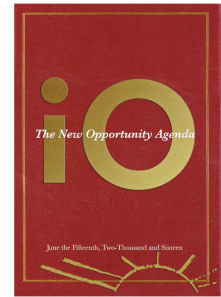
for educators and families forced to do “school” themselves, and advocated, with many others and with success, that

states start **funding families** (not failure). The result after months of tragic results and dire consequences for many was a surge in activism like we haven't seen since the early 90s!



A DYING MOVEMENT FINDS ITS SOUL AGAIN.

As I've written about before, the edreform "movement" that we helped launch lost its anchor, for a while (It's in our *New Opportunity Agenda, A Manifesto, 2016*, [online](#) or happy to send you a copy if you don't have it). What we argued then is that organizations and people who wanted to avoid making enemies of the establishment were only too happy to compromise away fundamental principles, like equity in giving student choice, widespread growth of charter schools, condemnation of teachers unions and more. The result even under the most choice-friendly administrations was more government rules and structures created, leading to fewer choices. China-breakers like CER were scorned by the new reform elite that grew up, our own cousin of the education Blob. But the real people at the local level who were demanding change stood their ground. So when Covid hit, and they experienced first hand the result of ineffective bureaucracies, their complacency was shaken. Suddenly the notion that we all should try to get along went out the window as the teachers unions kept a majority of students from getting educated all year.



THE GRASSROOTS RISES AGAIN - AND NEW LEADERS EMERGE

Those who sat and waited all these years for new leaders at the state level got motivated. They found new allies, created new schools, filed new legislation, and fought hard to expand educational freedom in all its incarnations. The result was the most aggressive season of school choice growth since 1997-98, with **14 new programs enacted** in the last 12 months alone. Thank you, **Randi** Weingarten!

Suddenly, charter schools showed growth again. Virtual and online charters, the idea of which even some state and national charter leaders had scorned, are now being held up as evidence of success (*even though the same people touting the new numbers are responsible for the decline in prior years, with their heavily-regulated government agenda*).

And the traditional public schools? One would think they would have learned something from the pandemic. But other than a few innovative school system

leaders and principals from state to state, the majority held on to their old ways of doing things. First they worked to eliminate virtual options when parents voiced concern about sending their kids back to school this school year. Then they fought against expanded choices. Now they are fighting parents over what they want their kids to learn!

PARENTS AREN'T TAKING IT ANY MORE.

They are voting with their feet. Traditional schools have lost almost 10% of their expected student enrollment based on prior years! And instead of doing something about it, or working to spend some of the \$190 billion they've received (in some states it amounts to almost \$12,000 per child!) they are whining about "funding cliffs" and not having enough money 3 years from now! They're also putting new astroturf on their football fields - but I digress.

1000 Flowers are Blooming - and more. Microschools like Janelle Wood's **Black Mothers Forum**, or Harrisburg's **Rock City Learning Center** are just two of thousands of new efforts that are going to support and engage families in their communities. **#ITrustParents** is no longer a hollow slogan. It's happening.

STOP.

We stopped to look and see what else we could do. And then we got to work searching for more innovators to show policymakers, parents, and the media just what happens when people have the power to create their own educational environments.

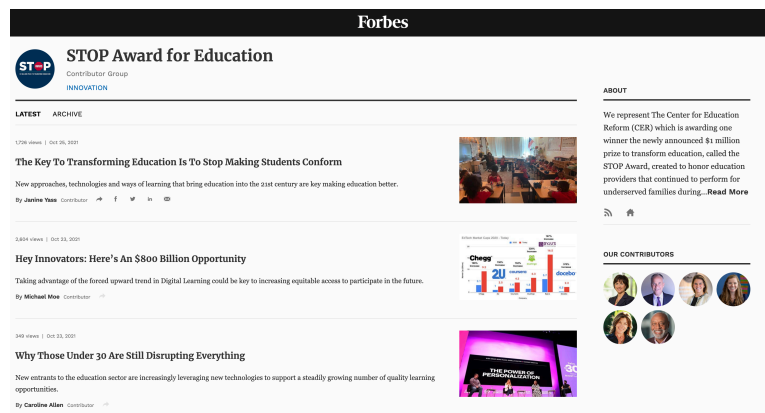
We had the privilege of partnering with one of the most visionary philanthropists in our nation, a former board member, who wanted to showcase the innovators who performed for kids during Covid, and to reward one with an extraordinary \$1 million prize. So we created the **STOP Award** with the goal of Transformative Education.



S.T.O.P. stands for **Sustainable, Transformative, Outstanding & Permissionless Education**. The \$1 million prize will be awarded in just a few weeks to the provider that best demonstrates education programming that is Sustainable, Transformational and Outstanding in *Permissionless* settings. Finalists will be part of a special cohort run by GSV that provides exposure to one another, to education innovators, practitioners and investors, prior to finalists being chosen and ultimately, a victor.

Forbes Partnership. Forbes, the fabled media company, has partnered with us to magnify the prize impact and shine a spotlight on disruptive innovations. As Forbes Chief Content Officer & Editor Randall Lane **put it**, *“Over the past 18 months, our nation’s education system was extremely challenged by the hurdles of the pandemic, but out of it came innovative thinking and new ideas that supported underserved families like never before. We know how important education is to underserved families, and we look forward to spotlighting some of the exceptional entrepreneurs and innovators striving to provide much-needed opportunities to disadvantaged students.”*

The five **STOP Award finalists** will be invited to attend the 2022 *30 Under 30* list launch party in NYC in December 2021, a place where the new young disruptors go, and the winner will be presented with the award on January 18, 2022, during the annual *Under 30* gathering in Davos, a day hosted by Forbes in partnership with MIT at the World Economic Forum summit.



And Now It's A School: The Case For Turning After-School Programs Into Real Schools. This is just one of many of the CER - STOP Award page articles at Forbes, which backs up why, and how, innovation can transform education. Go to forbes.com/sites/stopward to read along and follow our progress.

PRACTICING WHAT WE PREACH.

Through the generosity of Janine and Jeff Yass we have launched a fund to support sustainable, permission-less microschoools and pods in underserved communities. We have helped grow Black Mothers Forum-managed pods in Phoenix and Shreveport, church-based pods in Harrisburg and others. It's exhilarating to see what true parent power looks like up close and personal, and to learn by doing!

Choice is Constitutional, even though most people seem largely unaware. *CER to the rescue!* Using our megaphone and our reach, we are taking the great work done to secure



a victory in the U.S. Supreme Court case validating parents' rights to direct the education of their own kids (Hear that, candidates?) and pushing it out to major



policy leaders, most especially state lawmakers and Governors. *Espinoza v. Montana* decimated Montana's Blaine Amendment, sending shock waves through the other 36 states that have them. CER commissioned constitutional authority Paul Clement, the former solicitor general and former Supreme Court clerk to dig deeper into how best to use "Espinoza's sword" to remove Blaine amendments and pave the way for greater parental choice in the states. He is part of our legal swat team, thanks to the generosity of the Anschutz Foundation, the Strake Foundation, the Pharos Foundation and the Diana Davis Spencer Foundation.

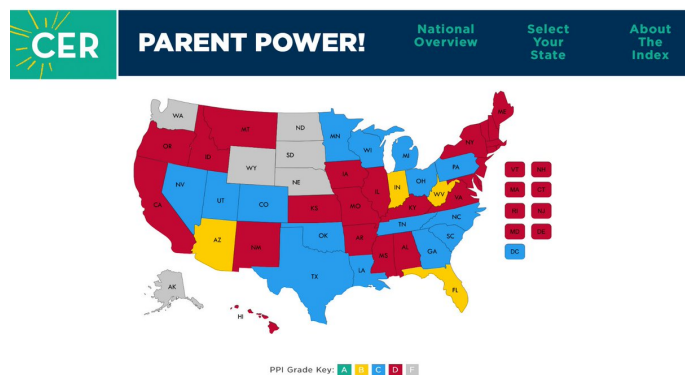
JOIN US IN PIAZZA.

This year we christened a new podcast, a homage to the *piazza* of old, which was the birthplace of politics, the center of commerce, the marketplace, and where people simply came to converse and share ideas. My co-host is also CER Chair and GSV founder **Michael Moe**, a real visionary, and together we've engaged thoughtful people (*Netflix founder Reed Hastings, Former U.S. House Speaker Paul Ryan, Scholar & Entrepreneur Ian Rowe, Girls With Impact CEO Jennifer Openshaw and many others*) to talk about their experience and not just education, but an overall focus on how we advance human potential. Sign up wherever you get your podcasts!

PARENT POWER!

When CER's first hard-copy *Parent Power!* newsletter was released in 1999, it was focussed on helping parents "make sense of school" and arm them with the knowledge and tools they needed to become forceful advocates for their kids, their schools and even for change.

We unleashed parents all over the country by talking about everything from standards, questions to ask your schools, whatever happened to penmanship (a personal favorite!) and how to teach boys! We delved into charters and choice, too and eventually went completely electronic. Some 23 years later, with the growth of others who took the baton to "do" parents locally, we refocused our energies on assembling all the best of policy prescriptions in one place to rank states and offer parents - and the public - a tool to learn, to judge their states, hold their leaders accountable and to get smart about what it takes to have top marks on the **Parent Power! Index**. It's a cool interactive tool now totally online, and we'd love for you to visit!



Mostly Virtual. Our mighty team of 13 is scattered throughout the country - from DC to California and in between. We've never not been somewhat virtual, but like everyone, Covid has challenged us. These days we're popping in and out of a much scaled down office but are connected with all sorts of cool tech tools for communications and project management that my young classmates at UPenn taught me about 5 years ago! Thank God we were ahead of the curve.

I'm so proud of my team and what we've been able to accomplish, but there is so much more to be done. Here are two simple, free ways to help -

- Stay informed! If you are not getting my new weekly newsletter Forza, please send me an email right now at jeanne@edreform.com and I'll make sure you are on the list. We do not spam you, do not sell lists, or send you things you do not want.
- Keep your eyes on edmaven.com, the new network we've been building that you will want to join so that you can continue the relationships and networking in a solely education-focussed platform.

Okay and now for the pitch! All of this takes substantial resources but we feel the pay-off of innovation in education is priceless. Enclosed is an envelope if you can afford a gift of any size. Or go online to edreform.com/donate.

I hope we can continue to count on your support.

I'm reminded at this time of year especially how grand our nation is. Rather than despair over the state of contentious civic life these days, I look forward to Thanksgiving and a recommitment to the principles upon which this nation was founded. Consider engaging your family and friends in an event to reinforce what most of us once learned. The **Plimoth Museums** have done the definitive work on what really happened that fateful day in 1621. Check out their events and share their resources.



I wish you and all those close to you a Blessed Thanksgiving, a safe, happy and healthy winter, and our commitment to you that we will, like our founders, persevere, no matter what.



We're thankful for all you do.

Jeanne Allen

Jeanne Allen, Founder & CEO

