

58% of legislators read *School Reform News*!

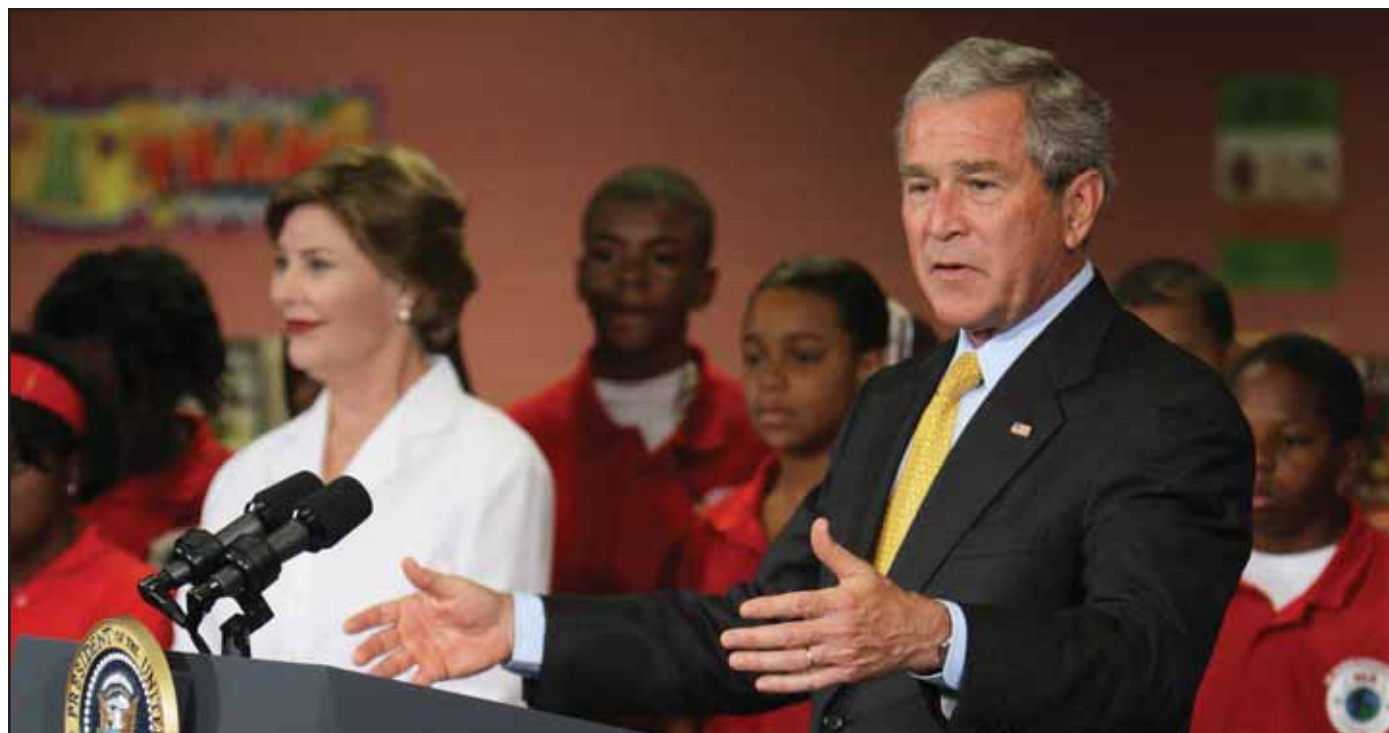
# School Reform News

©2007 The Heartland Institute

THE MONTHLY NEWSPAPER FOR SCHOOL REFORMERS

Vol. 11 No. 8 October 2007

PRESIDENT AND FIRST LADY LAUD NEW ORLEANS CHARTER SCHOOLS, PAGE 10



## Arizona Charter Schools Fight for Their Autonomy

By Jillian Melchior

Five Arizona charter schools must abide by all state standards for now, a Maricopa County Court judge ruled August 7.

The schools, with the help of the Goldwater Institute, filed a lawsuit in June against the Arizona Department of Education to guard against measures to make them teach history classes in

ARIZONA p. 6

## Louisiana Fails to Approve School Choice Measures

By Jillian Melchior

Though Louisiana legislators tried to give tax deductions to parents who want to enroll their children in private schools, their efforts fizzled this summer after one bill was vetoed and another was voted down.

LOUISIANA p. 17

## Maryland Court Says Charters Must Get Equal Per-Pupil Funding

*Observers say ruling will address charter school under-funding, inequity*

By Ben DeGrow

On July 31, a 7-2 majority of the Maryland Court of Appeals ruled the state's charter schools are entitled by law to the same per-pupil

funding other public schools receive.

Upholding a 2005 decision by the Maryland State Board of Education, the judges based their determination on a current state statute's call for "commensurate" funding.

Maryland public schools received about \$11,000 in funding per student for the 2004-05 school year, according to the U.S. Department of Education.

CHARTERS p. 4

## NEA Moves Even Further from Mainstream at Annual Convention

By Connie Sadowski

Rank-and-file teachers are becoming increasingly fed up with the far-left policies the National Association of Education (NEA) adopted at its annual convention in Philadelphia in early July—so fed up that some of them are planning to

become delegates themselves in order to change the union's makeup.

Sissy Jochmann, a second-grade teacher in Pittsburgh, took issue with some recommendations adopted by the NEA Board of Directors—such as incorporating sexual

NEA p. 14

NON PROFIT  
ORGANIZATION  
US POSTAGE PAID  
BEAVER DAM, WI  
PERMIT NO. 412

### INSIDE SRN

- 5 III. Charters Don't Drain Funds
- 8 Congress Aims at Graduation Rate
- 9 Education a Key Campaign Issue
- 10 New Orleans Charters Succeed
- 11 Penn. Increases EITC Funding
- 15 Successes Found for DC Vouchers
- 18 A Primer for Education Reporters

The Heartland Institute  
19 South LaSalle #903  
Chicago, IL 60603



# Win a Free Gift Basket!

Help us update our records for a chance to win a free gift basket by completing the form below. All fields must be completed to qualify to win. The information you provide below will be kept strictly confidential.

To qualify to win your free gift basket, please provide the following information! Please print, and note we cannot process requests that are not signed and dated. Entries must be received by November 1. Drawing will be held November 9. No purchase necessary.

NAME

EMAIL ADDRESS

COMPANY

ADDRESS

CITY • STATE • ZIP

SIGNATURE

DATE

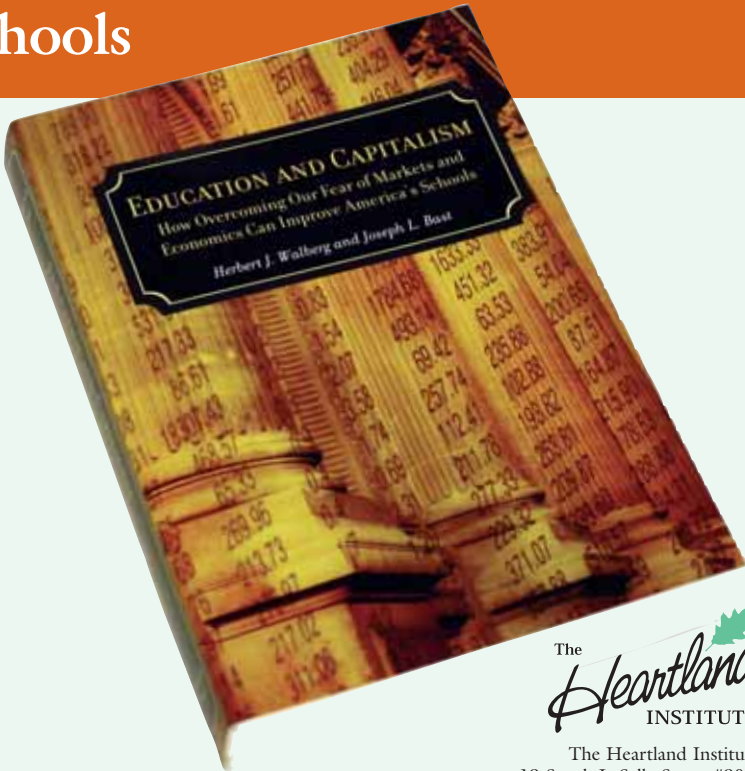
Fax or mail this form to:  
**SCHOOL REFORM NEWS**  
19 South LaSalle Street #903, Chicago, IL 60603 • phone 312.377.4000 • fax 312.377.5000



## How Overcoming Our Fear of Markets and Economics Can Improve America's Schools

*“Education and Capitalism explodes the myths that the free market cannot provide a better quality education for all students than the current government monopoly. Walberg and Bast have amassed an impressive array of data and arguments to make the case for an alternative system of American education.”*

LINDA CHAVEZ  
SYNDICATED COLUMNIST  
PRESIDENT, CENTER FOR EQUAL OPPORTUNITY



## ORDER YOUR COPIES TODAY!

Send check or money order for \$15 + \$3 shipping and handling to The Heartland Institute at 19 South LaSalle Street #903, Chicago, IL 60603. This and other great books are also available for purchase on our Web site at [www.heartland.org](http://www.heartland.org).

The Heartland Institute  
19 South LaSalle Street #903,  
Chicago, IL 60603



# School Reform News



**The Heartland Institute**  
19 South LaSalle Street #903  
Chicago, Illinois 60603  
312/377-4000 voice • 312/377-5000 fax

School Reform News is available on the Internet. Point your web browser to <http://www.heartland.org>.

PUBLISHER  
Joseph L. Bast

ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER  
Nikki Comerford

EXECUTIVE EDITOR  
Diane Carol Bast

SENIOR EDITOR  
S.T. Karnick

MANAGING EDITOR  
Karla Dial  
[dial@heartland.org](mailto:dial@heartland.org)

DESIGN AND PRODUCTION  
Elizabeth Ow, Kevin Leonard

ADVERTISING MANAGER  
Nikki Comerford

CIRCULATION MANAGER  
Latreece Vankinscott

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS  
Ben DeGrow, Fran Eaton  
Robert Enlow, Aricka Flowers  
Robert Holland, Krista Kafer  
David Kirkpatrick, Brian Kisida  
Dan Lips, Kate McGreevy, Jill Metz  
Richard Neal, Brent Riffel  
Connie Sadowski, Lisa Snell  
Herbert J. Walberg Ph.D., Lee H. Walker

BOARD OF DIRECTORS  
Rajeev Bal, Joseph Bast  
Robert Buford, James Fitzgerald  
Paul Fisher, Dan Hales  
William Higginson, James L. Johnston  
Biju George Kulathakal, Roy E. Marden  
David H. Padden, Frank Resnik  
Elizabeth Rose, Herbert J. Walberg Ph.D.  
Thomas Walton

**ADVERTISING:** School Reform News accepts display advertising and advertising inserts. For an advertising kit with rate card, contact Associate Publisher Nikki Comerford at 312/377-4000, e-mail [ncomerford@heartland.org](mailto:ncomerford@heartland.org).

School Reform News is published 10 times per year by The Heartland Institute. Subscriptions are \$36 per year. Order online at [www.heartland.org](http://www.heartland.org). Heartland is a nonprofit and non-partisan public policy research organization serving the nation's federal and state elected officials, journalists, Heartland Members, and other opinion leaders. Its activities are tax-exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

© 2007 The Heartland Institute. Nothing in this issue of School Reform News should be construed as reflecting the views of The Heartland Institute, nor as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any legislation.

# DC Opportunity Scholarship Program's Future in Question

First-year report on DC voucher program brings good news, page 15

By Dan Lips

About 1,800 children in Washington, DC headed to private schools in August using tuition scholarships provided through the DC Opportunity Scholarship fund. But whether those scholarships will be available in future years is questionable, as the program's legislative future is in doubt on Capitol Hill.

The DC Opportunity Scholarship program has been providing low-income students private school scholarships since 2004, when President George W. Bush signed into law the federal DC School Choice Incentive Act.

According to the Washington Scholarship Fund (WSF), the nonprofit group that administers the program, nearly 6,500 students have applied for scholarships over the past three years, or about three applicants for each scholarship slot.

**"[The DC Opportunity Scholarship program] must be reauthorized in the 110th Congress for the program to continue. Most of the members of the new Democratic majorities in the Senate and House of Representatives opposed the legislation when it was first proposed."**

## Reauthorization Battle

But the legislation must be reauthorized in the 110th Congress for the program to continue. Most of the members of the new Democratic majorities in the Senate and House of Representatives opposed the legislation when it was first proposed.

"I think there's very little chance that, when this runs out, it will be renewed," commented Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton, who represents the District in Congress. "I have said to [WSF] that I think the only responsible thing to do is to prepare the parents to understand that the program is unlikely to be funded, that it was experimental, it was never meant to be permanent."

## Committed Parents

Program supporters were disappointed

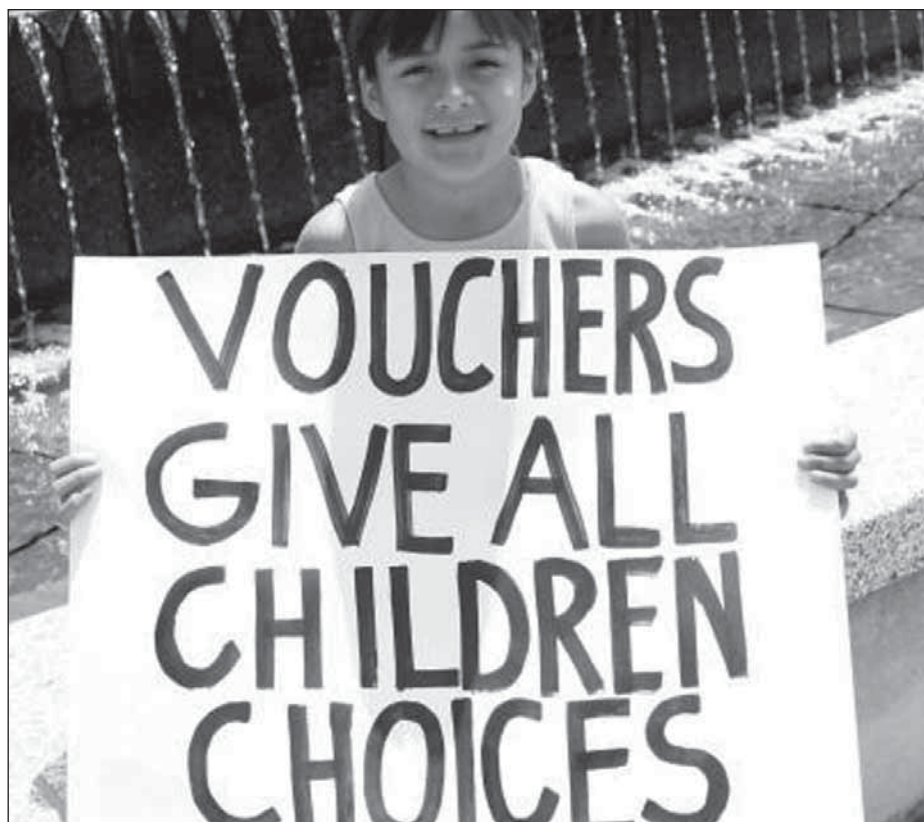


photo credit: Kathy Tenney

Utah students young and old carried placards supporting school choice at a May 15, 2007 rally.

by Norton's comments. Virginia Walden Ford, executive director of the advocacy group DC Parents for School Choice, which pressed for the program in 2004, said Norton hasn't reached out to parents to see how the program is benefiting their children.

"Del. Norton needs to talk to parents," Walden Ford said. "Parents with children in the program are thrilled about the new opportunities in private school. They are so happy to have their children in safe and high-quality schools."

Those parents, Walden Ford noted, are preparing to make their voices heard in the looming Congressional debate over reauthorization.

"We're already having meetings with parents," Walden Ford said. "We know that we need to get the word out about how the program is helping these children. That's the key. Parents have already begun meeting with the offices of senators and representatives. We're going there to introduce ourselves and to introduce members of Congress to parents so they can hear how the program is changing children's lives."

## Intense Debate

John Schilling, director of national projects at the DC-based Alliance for School Choice, hopes Congress will continue the program.

"The [Opportunity Scholarship Program] is doing exactly what its local sponsors intended," Schilling said, "and that is to provide educational opportunity to some of the District's low-income parents whose children have been denied that opportunity for years."

"Beyond enjoying overwhelming parental support," Schilling added, "[the program] is undergoing a rigorous federal evaluation to demonstrate effectiveness. The program also generates millions in additional federal money for DC public and charter schools as part of a three-sector approach to educational improvement."

Schilling said intense lobbying on both sides will take place this fall and winter. The Alliance for School Choice is just one of several groups planning to advocate on children's behalf.

"There are currently 1,800 students in OSP whose average family income is \$21,000 per year," Schilling said. "It is these courageous families, along with dedicated local business, policy, and community leaders, who are driving this debate and building support on Capitol Hill. Their passion and commitment will make the difference."

Dan Lips ([dan.lips@heritage.org](mailto:dan.lips@heritage.org)) is an education policy analyst at The Heritage Foundation in Washington, DC.

# Charters

Continued from page 1

## District Resistance

Baltimore's charter schools receive less than half the per-pupil cash funding available through the school district. The rest comes in the form of services. District officials filed a lawsuit in May 2005, after the State Board of Education interpreted a 2003 law to require equalized funding for the city's charters.

Charter schools are publicly funded nonsectarian schools subject to the same testing requirements and non-selective policies as other public schools. Charters have the freedom to choose their own curricula, programs, and personnel policies, serving as innovative alternatives fueled by parental demand.

"Parents want a different choice than the public schools that have been failing the children of Baltimore for decades," said Chris Summers, president of the Maryland Public Policy Institute, a free-market think tank in Germantown.

During the 2006-07 school year, 23 charter schools statewide educated less than 1 percent of the total number of public school students. Most charter schools were located in Baltimore.

## Different Choice

At press time, the Baltimore City Public School System had issued no response to the court of appeals' decision. One leading reformer says the ruling will give local education officials an opportunity to spend resources more efficiently on results.

**"[T]he Maryland Court of Appeals ruled the state's charter schools are entitled by law to the same per-pupil funding other public schools receive."**

"The Maryland decision creates a path that will allow school districts to explore how they can better fund and deliver public education, regardless of what public school a child attends," said Jeanne Allen, president of the Center for Education Reform, a national charter school advocacy group based in Bethesda.

One state lawmaker said he was disappointed with the ruling, saying it will skew funding.

"I think the decision was seriously in error," said state Sen. Paul Pinsky (D-St.



George's County). "I think it's going to result in charter school children receiving more money per pupil than other public school children."

Allen disagreed, saying the court "justly ruled that charter schools are entitled to be funded the same way all other public schools are funded."

## Operational Costs

An in-depth 2005 report by the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, a Virginia-based education reform group, found charter schools in 16 states and the District of Columbia were underfunded by an average of 21.7 percent during the 2002-03 school year.

Pinsky said a Maryland legislative study determined central administrative services account for approximately 13 to 15 percent of school operations. According to a July 31 *Baltimore Sun* article, Baltimore charter school operators said such costs comprise between 5 and 15 percent of their budgets. Under the ruling, Maryland charters would have to deduct only 2 percent for administrative costs. The rest of the money could be used to purchase administrative services as needed.

Pinsky argues the court misread the intent of the current law, passed in 2003. The "commensurate amount" should reflect what other public schools in the jurisdiction receive, not a figure of total budget costs divided by the number of students, he said.

"That money doesn't go into local school coffers, it's used to help build the whole system," Pinsky said.

Allen said the focus of school finance should be determined by children's individual needs.

"Money should follow students," Allen said. "That is the clear conclusion from this decision."

## Parental Demand

Pinsky supports legislation that will be heard in the next session to modify the law on which the appeals court's decision was based. He says the previous funding system was both fairer and more practical.

Summers hopes the ruling will spur more interest in meeting parental demand for schooling alternatives.

"Now that there is equal funding with the charter school ruling, maybe it will help those who have been sitting on the sidelines," Summers said. "Maybe it will help open the door for more market-oriented educational reforms."

Ben DeGrow ([ben@i2i.org](mailto:ben@i2i.org)) is a policy analyst for the Independence Institute, a free-market think tank in Golden, Colorado.

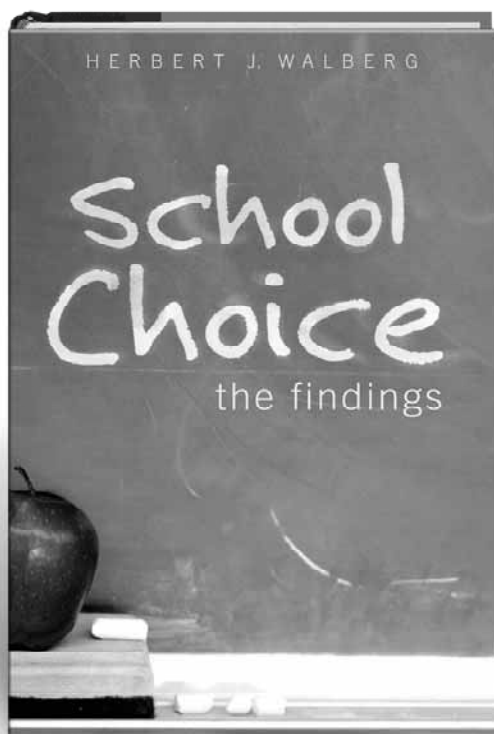
## INTERNET INFO

*Charter School Funding: Inequity's Next Frontier*, issued in August 2005 by the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, is available through *PolicyBot*™, The Heartland Institute's free online research database. Point your Web browser to <http://www.policybot.org> and search for document #21954.

"Charter school ruling could cost city millions," by Sara Neufeld, *Baltimore Sun*, July 31, 2007: Available for purchase from archive.

## New Book from the CATO INSTITUTE

*School Choice: The Findings* is the most comprehensive and up-to-date analysis available on the effectiveness of charter schools, private schools, and voucher programs. By reviewing current studies and research, the book overwhelmingly illustrates how and why the consensus is that competition and parental choice promote learning far more effectively than traditional public schools.



\$14.95 • hardcover  
978-1-933995-05-2

\$9.95 • paperback  
978-1-933995-04-5

Available in bookstores nationwide, by calling 800-767-1241, or by visiting [www.cato.org](http://www.cato.org).



# Civic Group Finds Illinois Charter Schools Don't Drain Resources

By Fran Eaton

In July, the Chicago-based, nonpartisan Civic Federation released a comprehensive study showing Illinois charter schools do not place undue financial burdens on their host school districts and do not hamper districts' ability to manage finances.

The 112-page assessment focused on three Illinois charter schools outside the Chicago Public School (CPS) system that had weathered a time of financial hardship for their host districts. During the 2003-04 school year, on which the study focused, the three schools relieved their host districts of 1.3 to 3 percent of the district's students while tapping only 0.9 to 2.4 percent of their host districts' operating budgets.

## No Drain

The Civic Federation authors found:

- The Illinois charter schools studied provided school choice without significantly burdening district budgets;
- The diversion of district funds to charter schools did not compromise districts' ability to manage financial obligations; and
- The state's funding per pupil and the growth or diminishment of property tax revenue had a stronger effect on the revenues available than enrollment growth or decline.

## 'Important Initiative'

The Civic Federation views charter schools "as an important initiative for public education," the study's authors wrote, "not only because charter schools provide school choice for parents and students, but also because charter schools offer an alternative model for the funding and governance of public schools."

Civic Federation President Lawrence Msall said charter schools' freedom from specific state mandates is paramount to their success.

"The best way for local schools to be more innovative is to unshackle them from state statutes and labor agreements," Msall said.

## Further Confirmation

The Civic Federation's study agrees with 2005 research from the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, *Charter School Funding: Inequity's Next Frontier*, which showed Illinois charter schools received 23 percent less funding than district schools—at the time, \$6,779 per pupil, compared to the district schools' \$8,801 per pupil, a gap of \$2,023.

"It's an impressive study, and the find-



ings speak volumes for the administrators of those charter schools studied," said Don Soifer, executive director of the Lexington Institute, referring to the Civic Federation work.

Soifer said even with the inherent disadvantages under which charter schools operate—usually, larger at-risk populations, an inability to pass tax referenda, and difficulties in borrowing funds because of the schools' time-limited charters—charter schools nationwide reflect the same general trends as were shown in the Illinois study.

"We're finding the same is generally true nationwide," Soifer said. "Charter schools do not drain district funding."

**"Illinois charter schools do not place undue financial burdens on their host school districts and do not hamper districts' ability to manage finances."**

## Persistent Opposition

The study's findings were questioned by Jack Norman, research director of the Institute for Wisconsin's Future (IWF), a group that works to increase funding for public schools. IWF opposes Milwaukee's school voucher program and charter school expansion.

"I'd ask if those charter schools are subject to the same obligations other schools in the district are required to abide by," Norman said.

The study showed charter schools often make special arrangements with host

districts to meet transportation, food service, and special-education demands.

## Easing Funding Problems

"A group's findings of whether a charter school drains funds completely depends


on how that group perceives charter schools," said Mike Griffith, a school finance analyst at the Greater Educational Opportunities Foundation, a national charter school advocacy group based in Colorado. "The debate on charter schools and how they affect school finances boils down to whether the monies received are less than what it costs to educate a student."

Both the Civic Federation and Thomas B. Fordham Foundation concluded charter school advocates are correct in arguing the schools actually ease the strain on public school funding.

Fran Eaton (featon@illinoisreview.com) writes from Illinois.

## INTERNET INFO

"The Financial Impact of Charter Schools on Illinois School Districts: A Primer and Three Case Studies," released July 23, 2007 by the Civic Federation, is available through *PolicyBot™*, The Heartland Institute's free online research database. Point your Web browser to <http://www.policybot.org> and search for document #21960.



**FREEDOM in FICTION**  
PRIZE

**Call for Book Proposal**

*Promoting liberty and self-reliance through popular culture*

**\$10,000 cash prize!**

**And an opportunity to win a total of \$100,000!**

The Freedom in Fiction Prize is an international prize that honors the best unpublished works of fiction with the greatest potential for imparting the ideas of free markets, liberty and personal responsibility across a wide audience in a positive manner. The contest is open to all individuals who meet the requirements set forth under the "competition rules." A panel of judges will pick the winning author, who will receive a \$10,000 cash prize, with an opportunity to win a total of \$100,000.

**[www.mackinac.org/FreedominFiction](http://www.mackinac.org/FreedominFiction)**

**Mr. Justin W. Marshall, Project Manager**  
Freedom in Fiction Prize  
140 West Main Street, Midland, Michigan 48640  
Phone: 989-631-0900 Mobile: 989-430-8667 Fax: 989-631-0964  
E-mail: [marshall@mackinac.org](mailto:marshall@mackinac.org)

# Arizona

Continued from page 1

the same order as public schools. The judge denied their injunction request on a technicality but will hear the case on its merits in the future.

At press time no trial date had been set. At issue is a struggle over charter school autonomy and state standards.

"We're really taking a symbolic stand for charter schools," said Dan Scoggin, chief executive officer of three of the charter schools, managed by Great Hearts Academies. "We feel like the state is coming in and messing with the curriculum, [and] is sort of meddling with 12 years of proven results."

## Differing Definitions

BASIS Tucson, BASIS Scottsdale, Chandler Preparatory Academy, Mesa Preparatory Academy, and Phoenix's Veritas Preparatory Academy prefer to teach world history before American history, saying it gives students a better foundation for understanding America's place in the world. The state Department of Education wants them to teach American history first, as the state's other public schools are required to do.

Tom Horne, state superintendent of public instruction, said the judge denied the charter schools' injunction because they waited too long to file their motion. Horne, a long-time charter school advocate, said in this case he thinks they're wrong.

"I think we have confusion between standards and curriculum," Horne said. He defines standards as what a student should know by the end of the year, and curriculum as how those standards are taught.

His department, Horne said, simply wants to set minimum standards, and charter school students tend not only to meet them but to surpass them. But they will be less likely to do so in history, Horne said, if they are not being taught in a given year what the standards expect them to learn that year.

Where the confusion arose "simply mystifies me. I haven't the foggiest idea," Horne said.

## Stifled Innovation

Scoggin likewise cited the charter



schools' history of high performance—they require a six-year liberal arts program and two years of calculus for every student, and they teach Aristotle, Dostoevsky, and Dickens.

But teaching history the state's way, Scoggin said, would undermine the schools' progress, micromanaging when and what they teach and forcing them to become more like district schools.

"Every year, the state's required more and more curriculum alignment," Scoggin said. "When are they going to stop? The regulations seem to increase every year."

## Need for Flexibility

Horne said he is concerned a ruling favoring the charter schools could completely undermine state standards. For the excellent charter schools, that wouldn't make much of a difference, he said, but for underachieving schools, undermining standards as a whole could have catastrophic effects on children's education.

He emphasized the standards don't mandate how the charter schools plan their curricula. They simply set a minimum expectation for what students must learn through the course of the year.

Furthermore, he said, if standards don't span from charters to public schools, children will lack the core knowledge they need to understand their classes if they transfer from one to another.

**"Five Arizona charter schools must abide by all state standards for now, a Maricopa County Court judge ruled August 7."**

"[It would represent] a triumph of ideology over common sense," Horne said.

But Scoggin said imposing the standards would undermine charter schools' purpose. They're supposed to be more flexible, he said, offering a unique curriculum with more innovative programs than public schools while still meeting basic graduation requirements.

Jillian Melchior (jmelchior@hillsdale.edu) writes from Michigan.

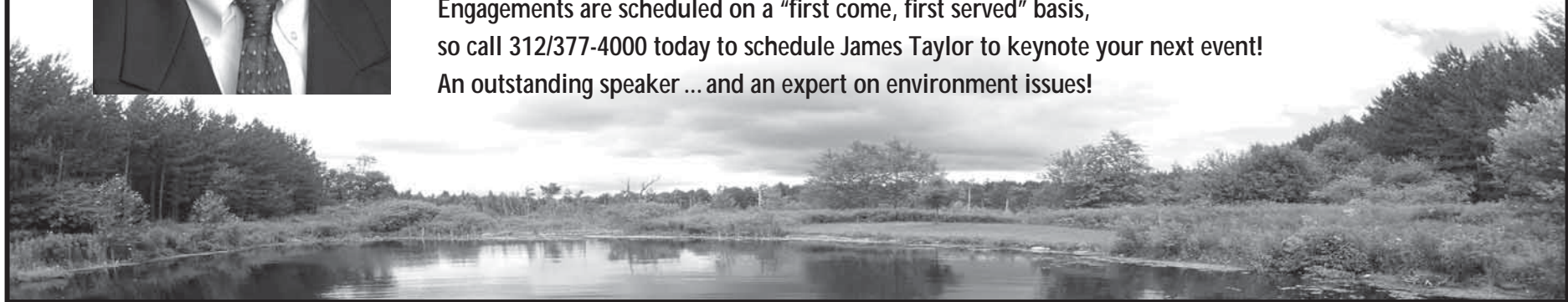
## Concerned about Climate Change? James Taylor says there's no cause for alarm!



James M. Taylor is managing editor of *Environment & Climate News*, a senior fellow with The Heartland Institute, and one of the nation's most sought-after speakers on climate change. He has addressed elected officials, civic organizations, and church groups – always to applause and praise for his knowledge and accessible speaking style.

Taylor is author of *What Climate Scientists Think about Global Warming* (Heartland Institute, 2007) and other Heartland publications. He has appeared on CNN's Glenn Beck show, the Fox News Channel, and the "Good Morning America" and "Newsmakers" national radio programs. His writing on environmental issues has appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*, *Houston Chronicle*, *Detroit News*, *Boston Globe*, *Tampa Tribune*, and elsewhere.

Engagements are scheduled on a "first come, first served" basis, so call 312/377-4000 today to schedule James Taylor to keynote your next event!  
An outstanding speaker ... and an expert on environment issues!





# Court-Ordered Spending Mandates Raise Taxes, Don't Help Education in the Long Term

By Ben DeGrow

A new report questions the effectiveness of school funding lawsuits in generating the sustained results their plaintiffs seek.

"Appropriation by Litigation," released by the Washington, DC-based Tax Foundation in late July, finds most states with education spending mandates imposed by the courts do not sustain the funding increases over the long-term.

Since 1977, courts in 27 states have dictated funding increases that resulted in short-term boosts to K-12 education funding. The nine states that explicitly raised taxes generated \$13 billion in new taxpayer revenue to fund the mandates.

The study finds the 18 states whose 2004 data were available spent an average of \$284 less per pupil than would have been forecast by spending growth trends before the judicial rulings.

"These lawsuits that deal with education tend to cause a lot of short-term pain, but they don't appear to have much long-term gain," said senior tax counsel Chris Atkins, the study's author. "Money is fungible—it can be moved around in a budget, but these taxes remain."

## Seeking Opportunity

A prominent legal analyst and education funding advocate claims otherwise.

"I could write a report similar to this but from a different side, about accessing more opportunities for needy kids," said Molly Hunter, managing director of the National Access Network, an advocacy group based in New York City. "People aren't looking to appropriate by litigation, they're looking to improve opportunity."

Others disagree with Hunter, saying the shift since the 1990s from school finance "equity" lawsuits to "adequacy" lawsuits reveals a more cynical turn by those who habitually advocate increased funding for public schools.

"[The 'adequacy' lawsuits trend] tells

me that '60s-style liberalism is dead," said John LaPlante, education policy fellow at the Flint Hills Center for Public Policy in Kansas. "This isn't about the poor. This is about people in the establishment getting theirs through phony-baloney legal alchemy."

**"These lawsuits that deal with education tend to cause a lot of short-term pain, but they don't appear to have much long-term gain. Money is fungible—it can be moved around in a budget, but these taxes remain."**

**CHRIS ATKINS  
SENIOR TAX COUNSEL  
TAX FOUNDATION**

## Harmful Approach

Atkins points out filing lawsuits to increase education funding can have unintended harmful effects.

"The people who bring these lawsuits want to introduce more money to [public] schools, and they do so by adding a lot of friction between different branches of government," Atkins said. "They want courts to make decisions that stretch interpretations of the constitution."

Atkins said the objective may not necessarily be bad, but the method chosen is ineffective.

"It's one thing for a community and a state to come together and say, 'Let's spend more money,' and for a plan to be crafted that everyone agrees with," Atkins explained. "It's a different thing to have a court come out and say more money needs to be spent on schools. It's a blunt instrument."

LaPlante agreed, saying judicial interference in school funding decisions, as in the 2005 Kansas case *Montoy v. State*, makes inherently bad policy.

"It fails Civics 101 because we've got members of the judiciary making decisions about appropriations," said LaPlante. "It fails Management 101 because they say, 'We're going to tell you to increase funding by this amount, and we don't care what else you have to do.'"

## Kentucky Failure

Hunter cites Kentucky as an example of a satisfactory outcome of the funding litigation strategy. Following a court order in 1990, the Bluegrass State increased sales tax and corporate income tax rates to generate \$682 million in new revenue for schools. Per-pupil funding initially grew by more than \$1,500, according to the Tax Foundation study.

"If people look back over the years, we did a really important and good thing in Kentucky," said Hunter.

Atkins disputes the claim, noting the increases have not been sustained.

"At the end of the day, they're now back in court," Atkins said. "Per-pupil funding isn't really up, and their students may not be performing any better as a result of the decision."

## Spending and Outcomes

Atkins said questions about the relationship between spending and academic performance were outside the scope of his study, noting the difficulty in choosing how to measure outcomes.

Atkins plans to deepen his research into the fiscal impact of judicial mandates and hopes the study can be expanded beyond the field of education. He suggested similar litigation might be used in the future to secure funds for other beneficiaries of state budgets.

"It will be interesting to see whether other groups try this strategy," Atkins said.

Ben DeGrow ([ben@i2i.org](mailto:ben@i2i.org)) is a policy analyst for the Independence Institute, a free-market think tank in Golden, Colorado.

## INTERNET INFO

"Appropriation by Litigation: Estimating the Cost of Judicial Mandates for State and Local Education Spending," Chris Atkins, Tax Foundation, July 2007: <http://www.taxfoundation.org/publications/show/22505.html>



*Faith 1st*  
Educational Assistance Corporation

**5th Anniversary Banquet**  
A Celebration of God's Faithfulness

*Location*  
Eastwick at the Meadows  
6630 Lindbergh Boulevard  
Philadelphia, PA 19153

*Date*  
Saturday, November 3, 2007  
*Time*  
4:00pm - 7:00pm

*Speaker*  
Lawrence W. Reed  
Mackinac Center for Public Policy  
Midland, Michigan

*Donation \$45*

*"This will be the 'faith-builder of the century... you do not want to miss it!"*

Dr. Alberta C. Wilson  
Founder/CEO

*"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."*  
Hebrews 11:1

For more information please call: 215-870-9454

## COMMENTARY

# Congress May Act to Define Graduation Rate

By Richard G. Neal

Because accurate measures of dropout and graduation rates are so important for accountability purposes, and because states and local school districts have done such a deplorable job in reporting them, Congress is poised to take serious action.

Rep. Mike Castle (R-DE) and Rep. Bobby Scott (D-VA) introduced separate bills this summer that would require accurate information regarding dropout and graduation rates. Of the two bills, Scott's "Every Student Counts Act" (H.R. 2955) is by far the more comprehensive and is more likely to be considered.

The bill aims to ensure all states measure graduation rates in the same manner. That will make it possible to compare graduation rates among local school districts and states. This information can then be used to help find ways to enable more students to remain in school.

## Longstanding Problem

For decades, local school districts and state education departments have under-reported dropout rates and inflated graduation rates. Despite an accountability



President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act on January 8, 2002 at Hamilton High School, Hamilton in Ohio.

provision in the No Child Left Behind Act requiring graduation rates be reported accurately, and despite the fact that all 50 states signed the National Governors

Association Graduation Rate Compact in 2005, governments continue to spew faulty data on this important topic.

"Sadly, dishonest reporting about graduation rates turns out to be widespread," wrote Larry Uzzell in a 2005 Cato Institute policy brief.

**"According to several recent independent and reliable research investigations, the national average dropout rate is a staggering 33 percent, meaning one of three high school students does not graduate on schedule."**

According to several recent independent and reliable research investigations, the national average dropout rate is a staggering 33 percent, meaning one of three high school students does not graduate on schedule. And according to *Time* magazine, that figure approaches an alarming 50 percent for Latinos and African-Americans.

## Streamlining Data

During the 2004-05 school year, more than 1.2 million high school students dropped out. According to the Pew Partnership for Civic Change, this amounts to one student dropping out of school every nine seconds.

The JustChildren program of Virginia's Legal Aid Justice Center said more than

28,000 students in the state who enrolled as high school freshmen in 2000 did not receive a diploma four years later. Just-Children called for an investigation into state projections that 69,774 students would graduate in 2004. That is 29 percent fewer than the number of children who entered high school in 2000.

## Breaking Monopolies

In a 2007 RAND Corporation article, "When Students Disappear," John F. Pane concludes, "Students nationwide should be assigned unique and permanent identifiers to link them with their own records, and not the records of other students with the same name. The identifier must be recoverable if a student appears in a new school with none of his or her personal records."


Although the current legislation would result in some improvement in the accounting of dropout and graduation rates, it fails to address the underlying problem, which is that the public school system is a *de facto* monopoly that provides limited options. As a result, over a four-year period millions of students walk away from a "free" education because it has so little to offer them.

Until that monopoly is broken up and students have market-based choices, high dropout rates will continue.

Richard G. Neal (rneal1@triad.rr.com) writes from North Carolina.


## Teachers!

**Encourage your students to take this online global warming test.**



# Take the Test

Take the original 10 question global warming test at [www.heartland.org](http://www.heartland.org), and let the debate begin!



## INTERNET INFO

"No Child Left Behind: The Dangers of Centralized Education Policy," by Lawrence A. Uzzell, *Policy Analysis* No. 544, released on May 31, 2005 by the Cato Institute, is available through *PolicyBot™*, The Heartland Institute's free online research database. Point your Web browser to <http://www.policybot.org> and search for document #17430.

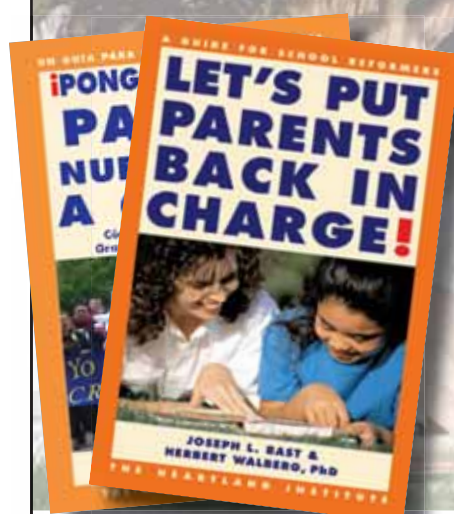
"Dropout Nation," by Nathan Thornburgh, *Time*, April 17, 2006: <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1181646,00.html>

H.R. 2955, July 10, 2007: <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c110:H.R.2955>:

"When Students Disappear," by John F. Pane, RAND Corporation, February 21, 2007: <http://www.rand.org/commentary/022107EW.html>



## Energize Your School Choice Campaign!



# LET'S PUT PARENTS BACK IN CHARGE!

by Joseph L. Bast & Herbert J. Walberg, Ph.D.

*Let's Put Parents Back in Charge!* — a groundbreaking bilingual (English/ Spanish) tool for the school choice movement — is available free of charge (in quantities of 50 to 500) to grassroots school choice efforts, charter schools, parent groups, elected officials, and others.

State legislatures across the country are considering vouchers, tuition tax credits, and other measures that would give parents more control over their children's educational futures. But before they'll act, they need to hear from informed, motivated constituents.

To energize your school choice effort with *Let's Put Parents Back in Charge!* contact Michael Van Winkle, The Heartland Institute's legislative specialist for education policy, at 312/377-4000, email [vanwinkle@heartland.org](mailto:vanwinkle@heartland.org).

Individual copies can be ordered for \$5.95 in The Heartland Institute's online store at <http://www.heartland.org>.



## The Educational Morass

OVERCOMING THE STALEMATE IN AMERICAN EDUCATION

By Myron Lieberman

Foreword by J. Stanley Marshall, president, Florida State University, 1969-1976 and founding chairman, James Madison Institute



2007, 256 pages  
ISBN 1-57886-623-5 (978-1-57886-623-6) \$24.95 \$20.00 paper  
ISBN 1-57886-622-7 (978-1-57886-622-9) \$60.00 \$48.00 cloth

"When historians look back on the reform era, Myron Lieberman will stand alone as a voice in the wilderness. The thoroughness of his research, the clarity of his writing, and the objectiveness of his reasoning in *The Educational Morass* show why he is one of the true intellectual champions of American education. It takes courage to tell the emperor he wears no clothes." —John M. McLaughlin, Ph.D., founder, The Education Industry Report

"Mike Lieberman is one of the most deeply knowledgeable people in our country about the workings of education today. He analyzes that knowledge from a position of independence. He is a stubborn and fearless critic of the massive follies, both right and left, both Democrat and Republican, that plague us. His work is a spur to reform."

—Larry P. Arnn, president, Hillsdale College, Michigan

*The Educational Morass* is about the ineffectiveness of public education in the United States today and why it is unlikely to achieve significant improvement in the absence of heavy external pressure. The reason for these conclusions and what can be done about it are the core of this book. It is an explanation of why the most popular educational reforms are either misguided or practically impossible to achieve. The book also explains why several reforms which would bring about significant improvement are not under consideration. Although a conservative himself, Lieberman asserts that conservative illusions about public education and about unions and employment issues generally also play a major role in the failure to bring about significant reform.

**Rowman & Littlefield Education**  
4501 Forbes Blvd., Ste. 200 Lanham, MD 20706  
1.800.462.6420 [www.rowmaneducation.com](http://www.rowmaneducation.com)  
Use Promo Code 6SRN0907 and Save 20%!

# Hispanics Want 2008 Candidates to Focus on Education: Poll

*High dropout rate is a major concern*

By Jillian Metz

If 2008 presidential hopefuls want a piece of the Latino voting pie, they must concentrate on their educational agendas and focus on the future of America's public education system, according to the results of a national poll released July 23.

Latinos nearly unanimously identified education as a "very important priority" for presidential candidates—one they said will heavily affect their vote.

The nationally representative poll of 1,026 registered Latino voters, sponsored by ED in '08 and the National Council of La Raza, found nearly 90 percent of respondents consider education to be more important than health care and the Iraq war.

## Pressing Problem

According to the poll, Latinos say their staggering dropout rate is the greatest educational problem. According to the Diplomas Count study released by *Education Week* on June 12, just over half of Latino freshmen go on to graduate with their peers.

"This poll demonstrates what Hispanic CREO has already learned in its work with parents around the nation," said Maite Arce, the group's vice president. "Our next president has the opportunity to introduce strong measures to address the dropout rate and to remedy the problem in our schools. If not, our future economy will collapse under the strain of a low-skilled workforce and a knowledge gap that we cannot close."

Hispanic CREO, based in Washington, DC, was founded in 2001 to address the crisis in Latino education by empowering families with parental choice in education.

## Economic Future

Poll respondents said the "lack of parental involvement in their children's education" is one of the two most important problems facing the Hispanic community. Half of the parents surveyed also indicated parents like themselves are to blame for the low graduation rate.

"American voters must take a special interest in America's school dropout rate," Arce said. "More than 40 per-

cent of Latino children drop out of high school, and Latinos make up the largest segment of today's young generation. Our public schools are not adequately preparing our children for the workforce, and that will ultimately affect retiring Baby Boomers and our nation's economy."

## Strong Support for Choice

Last October, a poll of Florida Hispanic voters revealed 70 percent "favor allowing low-income parents using state funds to send their children to the school of their choice whether it is a public or private school."

School choice empowers parents to choose the school they believe will provide the highest-quality education for their children. With school choice, education options for low-income families are no longer restricted by their socioeconomic status, and parents are engaged in the educational process, said Step Up For Students spokeswoman Denise Lasher.

Step Up For Students, Florida's school choice program, was created five years ago to provide options to Florida's low-income families. The program now empowers more than 17,000 low-income students, 25 percent of whom are Hispanic, to attend the school of their parents' choice.

"In Florida, the high school graduation rate for Hispanics is only 60 percent," Lasher said. "This survey demonstrates that Latino parents will be looking for solutions from those looking for their votes."

Jillian Metz ([jillian.metz@gmail.com](mailto:jillian.metz@gmail.com)) writes from Florida.

## INTERNET INFO

"New Poll: Latino Voters Will be Most Impacted by Presidential Candidates' Positions on Education," National Council of La Raza, July 23, 2007: [www.nclr.org/content/news/detail/47514](http://www.nclr.org/content/news/detail/47514)

"Diplomas Count," *Education Week*, June 12, 2007: <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2007/06/12/40gradprofiles.h26.html>

# New Orleans Charter Schools LEAP to New Heights

By Michael Van Winkle

New achievement test data show charter schools in New Orleans are consistently outperforming their traditional public school counterparts.

The Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP) results from spring 2007, released July 20, offered the first meaningful comparison of school performance in New Orleans since Hurricane Katrina wiped out the city two years ago.

Louisiana charter schools fared well statewide, with 74 percent of eighth-graders scoring at or above "basic" in English and 76 percent in math. They topped the state averages of 69 percent and 64 percent, respectively.

## Across-the-Board Success

According to published reports, New Orleans charter schools did particularly well, besting public schools at every grade level. Of the 20 top-performing schools in the city, 17 were charter schools, according to an August 1 *Times-Picayune* article.

"It comes as no surprise that when you combine two very powerful forces—freedom and accountability—you get results," said Jeanne Allen, president of the Washington, DC-based Center for Education Reform, who calls New Orleans' charter schools Katrina's "silver lining."

Before the hurricane, Allen said, "advocates could not get lawmakers to grow charter schools for love or money." But now, "the freedom from union rules and onerous bureaucracy and the choices that teachers and parents are permitted to make are the driving forces behind the new achievement story in New Orleans."

## Proof of Success

New Orleans schools have undergone dramatic changes since Hurricane Katrina hit the city in August 2005. After the tragedy, the many public schools classified as in "crisis" were taken over by the Recovery School District and converted



President George W. Bush and First Lady Laura Bush pose with students at the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Charter School for Science and Technology in New Orleans on August 29.

into charter schools. Currently, 38 charter schools operate in New Orleans, and there are many more in surrounding areas such as Algiers.

**"New achievement test data show charter schools in New Orleans are consistently outperforming their traditional public school counterparts."**

Charter schools are public schools run by community-based, nonprofit organizations under a contract called a charter. They are usually exempt from burdensome legislative mandates and hiring regulations. This allows them to experi-

ment with reforms that often result in greater student gains. Schools that don't meet the objectives of their charters can be shut down.

Some observers have criticized charter schools for being lightly regulated, but others argue more flexibility allows schools to better adapt to students' needs and motivate them to learn. The LEAP, they say, vindicates this approach.

"Crawling out from under a hurricane and posting these kinds of numbers [on the LEAP] just shows you what parental and community involvement can accomplish," noted state Rep. Tim Burns (R-Mandeville).

## Nimble Schools

Why the success? Burns says it is because "a nimble, motivated organization, like a charter school, can outperform the bureaucratic public system."

State Rep. Carl Crane (R-Baton Rouge), chairman of the Louisiana House Education Committee, agrees. Crane noted, "Charters have their own boards and their own people making sure their schools are accountable, which ensures decision-making power rests with parents and the community."

State Sen. Chris Ullo (D-Harvey), who chairs the Louisiana Senate Education Committee, called the initial LEAP scores "encouraging" but argued "it would be premature to draw final conclusions about [charter schools'] comparative performance" from them.

## Model Reforms

Ullo warned it is "too early to determine if other school districts should look to the New Orleans charter schools as a model." But he also noted, "if charter schools continue to outperform traditional public schools, then we need to look carefully at their successful practices and emulate them in classrooms across the state."

Crane said he hopes the "education community will recognize that the traditional approach isn't always the best, and that sometimes we have to think outside the box."

"If we're committed to improving [academic] performance," Crane added, "then we'll look at whatever is working as a possible model, no matter where it is in the country."

Michael Van Winkle ([mvanwinkle@heartland.org](mailto:mvanwinkle@heartland.org)) is *The Heartland Institute's* legislative specialist for education.

## INTERNET INFO

"Charter Schools Lead Way on LEAP," by Darran Simon, *The Times-Picayune*, August 1, 2007: <http://www.nola.com/education/t-p/index.ssf?/base/news-3/118594810616750.xml&coll=1>

# Georgia Special-Needs Scholarships in High Demand

By Lori Drummer

More than 5,000 Georgia families have applied for special-needs scholarships since Gov. Sonny Perdue (R) signed the new program into law on May 18. As of August 9, the Georgia State Board of Education had approved 118 private schools to accept the scholarships in the 2007-08 school year.

Students had to be enrolled in a participating private school by September 10, and those schools had to report the

scholarship-student enrollment to the Georgia Department of Education by September 14.

The Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Program allows parents of disabled children to use the state dollars that would have been spent on their children's education in public schools to send them to the public or private school of their choice. At press time, no public schools had registered with the state to participate in the program. The

estimated average voucher will be about \$9,000.

## Using Options

With the help of the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship, Gilbert and Nadine James' son David, 10, entered sixth grade at St. Peter Claver in the Atlanta suburb of Decatur. David, who has a speech impediment and receives speech therapy twice a week, left DeKalb County public schools, where he would have

attended Salem Middle School.

"The middle school David was slated for has been ranked as failing during the past four years," Nadine James said. "I didn't think he would receive the level of school work he needed at Salem. And with the scholarship, we were willing to pay the difference."

"He has been there about two weeks, but he has really adjusted, and they are giving him some extra help," Nadine

**CONTINUED on right**



CONTINUED from left

said. "There are only 15 people in his class. He had 25 children in his other classes."

#### Parents Making Sacrifices

Though tuition at St. Peter Claver is a little more than \$7,000 a year, and the James family qualified for a \$4,500 scholarship, Nadine said it "opens up a window for us to do this."

"My child is worth it," Nadine said. "If I have to go and get another part-time job, I would do it. I am just so encouraged. He is so much more enthused because he is excited about his teachers."

**"More than 5,000 Georgia families have applied for special-needs scholarships since Gov. Sonny Perdue signed the new program into law on May 18."**

#### Breaking Records

Arizona, Florida, Ohio, and Utah have similar special-needs scholarship programs, and according to the Alliance for School Choice, a national organization based in Washington, DC, participation rates are at record numbers.

The Georgia Special-Needs Scholarship was modeled after the nation's first such program, Florida's John M. McKay Scholarship for Students with Disabilities. More than 18,273 students currently use McKay scholarships, representing a net increase of more than 1,700 percent since the scholarships became available statewide in 2000. More than 800 private schools accept McKay students in Florida.

The program saw a 15 percent increase in student participation from 2005 to 2006, according to the Florida Department of Education's McKay Scholarship Program quarterly report.

Participation in Utah's Carson Smith Special Needs Scholarship Program has increased by 402 percent since Gov. Jon Huntsman (R) signed the program into law in 2005. More than 40 private schools are now participating in the program, according to the Utah Department of Education.

Similarly, Ohio's Autism Scholarship Program's student participation has increased by 81 percent since its inception in 2004.

*Lori Drummer (ldrummer@allianceforschoolchoice.org) is director of state projects at the Alliance for School Choice in Washington, DC.*

## Penn. Legislature Approves Increase in Funding for Scholarship Tax Credit



On May 8, more than 2,300 school choice advocates rallied at the state capitol to celebrate the sixth anniversary of the Pennsylvania Education Improvement Tax Credit.

By Michael Coulter

When the Pennsylvania legislature finalized the state budget for the 2007-08 fiscal year on July 18, lawmakers increased the allocation for the Education Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) to \$75 million, an increase of \$16 million over last year.

For the 2007-08 fiscal year, organizations making donations to nonprofit scholarship-granting programs can take a total of \$44.66 million in credits, as well as \$22.33 million in credits for contributions to school improvement organizations. An additional \$8 million in credits may be taken for donations to organizations granting preschool scholarships.

"The General Assembly should be applauded for recognizing the tremendous impact the EITC program is having on families across the Commonwealth," said Andrew LeFevre, executive director of the REACH Alliance, a school choice advocacy group based in Harrisburg. "Thousands of additional families will now have access to the schools of their choice because of our legislative leaders' foresight."

#### Popular Program

The Pennsylvania EITC was established in 2001 at the urging of then Gov. Tom Ridge (R). The total amount of credits permitted in 2001 was \$30 million, with a \$20 million limit for donations to scholarship organizations and a \$10 million limit for donations to school improvement organizations.

Each year, the credit—awarded on a

first-come, first-served basis—has been exhausted well before the end of the fiscal year, with more than 2,300 Pennsylvania businesses participating.

The credit for the 2004-05 school year was exhausted in less than two months, LeFevre said, and in 2005-06 it was exhausted on the first day of the fiscal year. Last year businesses reached the limit within three months. At press time LeFevre projected they would reach the new limit by mid-September, less than three months into the fiscal year.

According to the REACH Alliance, approximately 33,000 students in Pennsylvania received scholarships during the 2006-07 year. The EITC is limited to households where total income is \$50,000 plus \$10,000 for each child in the household.

#### Massive Savings

Last year, the average scholarship amount was \$1,090, while the average cost to educate a student in a Pennsylvania public school is approximately \$11,000. The REACH Alliance, in a July 2007 analysis by LeFevre and Nate Bohlander, estimates the EITC saves the state \$327 million annually.

The Commonwealth Foundation for Public Policy Alternatives—a think tank based in Harrisburg—published a policy brief in July written by Mary Yoder and Jared Walczak, who offered a slightly more conservative savings estimate of \$305 million since the program began.

Citing a Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation study that found 30 percent

of scholarship recipients would attend public schools without the scholarship, Yoder and Walczak wrote, "for each dollar in EITC tax credits, school districts saved at least \$1.89."

#### Room to Grow

Despite the increased tax credit caps, Nathan Benefield, the Commonwealth Foundation's director of policy research, says the demand for scholarships will outstrip supply.

"It was good to see the increase, and it's certainly positive, but the amount of the credit is small compared to the amount spent on public education," said Benefield.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education reported total state spending allocated for pre-K through 12th grade education is \$9.4 billion for the 2007-08 fiscal year. The EITC limit is less than 1 percent of that amount. Benefield cited one new program—Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts—that will spend \$75 million on 11,000 students.

"We'd like to see an even greater expansion to meet the demand for scholarships," Benefield said.

*Michael Coulter (mfcoulter@gcc.edu) writes from Pennsylvania.*

### INTERNET INFO

The following documents are available through *PolicyBot™*, The Heartland Institute's free online research database. Point your Web browser to <http://www.policybot.org> and search for the document numbers provided below.

"Fiscal Impact of the Educational Improvement Tax Credit Program," by Nate Bohlander and Andrew T. LeFevre, REACH Foundation *Issue Analysis*, Vol. 1, No. 2, July 2007, **document #21955**

"Education by the Numbers: The Fiscal Effect of School Choice, 1990-2006," by Susan Aud, Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation, May 7, 2007, **document #21956**

"The Dollars and Sense of School Choice," by Mary Yoder and Jared Walczak, *Policy Brief*, Commonwealth Foundation, July 31, 2007, **document #21957**

# Teachers Union Pushes Rollback of NCLB Standard

By Robert Holland

As Congress prepares to debate reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act, the nation's largest teachers union is pushing a revival of portfolio assessment as one way for schools and states to show they are producing results with their billions in federal K-12 aid.

The National Education Association (NEA) has kept up a drumbeat of criticism of the standardized reading and math tests states have used to gauge students' proficiency since Congress enacted President George W. Bush's signature education law in 2001.

NEA lobbyists are urging Congress to let states use "multiple measures"—performance-based or portfolio assessment prominent among them, along with attendance and graduation rates—to judge whether schools are producing results, rather than relying on tests with right and wrong answers.

Portfolios are collections of any sort of student work done over time—essays, book reviews, drawings, laboratory reports, and research projects in any subject.

**"[T]he nation's largest teachers union is pushing a revival of portfolio assessment as one way for schools and states to show they are producing results with their billions in federal K-12 aid."**

## Ongoing Debate

In a July 30 speech at the National Press Club, U.S. House Education Committee Chairman George Miller (D-CA) indicated he might support such varied methods of assessment but said his committee would not consider an NCLB bill until after the August recess. That could delay reauthorization until legislators are caught up in the 2008 campaigns.

The NEA initiative comes amid debate over whether NCLB is beginning to spur modest gains in basic skills or instead is prompting states to lower standards in order to meet annual benchmarks for progress. Some NCLB critics are arguing for a single national test, while others are advocating allowing all states and localities to decide standards for themselves while still taking the federal money.

The NEA and other critics of standardized testing contend portfolios give a broader view of student achievement than do multiple-choice tests. In a March 13 statement to the Senate Education Committee, NEA President Reg Weaver argued scores on existing tests of basic math and read-

ing skills "reflect little more than a student's ability to regurgitate facts."

## 'Worst' System

Weaver contended "performance-based" measures are better for measuring such "twenty-first century skills" as higher-order thinking and problem-solving.

"Portfolio assessments are certainly accepted as a useful tool by a teacher within a classroom, when used alongside standardized tests, to determine an individual child's progress and needs," noted Don Soifer, executive vice president of the Lexington Institute, a Virginia-based think tank. "But they are not a valid tool to establish how well an entire school or school district is performing in relation to other schools or districts."

"Basing NCLB's accountability system on portfolio assessments would produce the worst of all worlds for students and taxpayers—all of the federal dollars and involvement in education with none of the accountability for academic results," Soifer concluded.

## Inadequate Feedback

Portfolio assessment as a tool of statewide evaluation has a track record from the 1990s that concerns J.E. Stone, president of the nonprofit Education Consumers Foundation.

While portfolio assessment is useful for providing detailed feedback to learners, said Stone, "it is cumbersome and far too



complex for the kind of overall learning outcome reports needed by policymakers and the public.

"The two states that attempted to build their accountability systems around portfolio assessments—Kentucky and Vermont—had to abandon the project," Stone noted. "In both cases, the systems virtually collapsed of their own weight."

## Failed States

In Kentucky, a legislatively commissioned 1995 study of the portfolio assessment required by the state's 1990 education reform act revealed significant problems. Among them were lack of controls to ensure reliability and great variation in the assistance students received from teachers, peers, and parents in performing tasks.

A RAND Corporation team reached similar conclusions after examining portfolio assessment in Vermont. One school

or teacher might require one kind of project; another school or teacher an entirely different sort. In addition, portfolios were time-consuming, expensive, and robbed teachers of time to teach basic skills.

In his 2005 book, *Kill the Messenger: The War on Standardized Testing*, Richard Phelps contended portfolios are "open invitations to cheating."

"If a student turns in a portfolio for a statewide, standardized assessment, who is to know if the essay enclosed is written by that student, or her mother, or by someone in New Zealand who posted it on the Internet?" Phelps noted.

The NEA's campaign is sure to appeal to many parents who believe their children have to take too many multiple-choice tests. But as *San Francisco Chronicle* columnist Debra J. Saunders observed this summer, "parents should be aware that NCLB does not constitute the array of tests students take in public schools, but mandates one math and one reading test, chosen by each state, for third-graders through eighth-graders to take each year."

Robert Holland (holland@heartland.org) is a senior fellow for education policy with The Heartland Institute.

## Not all blacks are liberals (... and that's a good thing)

Lee H. Walker is president of The New Coalition for Economic & Social Change and a senior fellow of The Heartland Institute. He is a former member of the Illinois State Board of Higher Education, commissioner with the Midwestern (10 States) Higher Education Commission, and National President of the National Guardsmen. He currently serves on the editorial board of the *Chicago Defender*. Mr. Walker was recently appointed chairman of the Illinois Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.

The New Coalition's mission is to cultivate effective multi-ethnic spokespersons on ideas that empower people with free enterprise and self-reliance. It helps these spokespersons gain access to forums where the major public policy issues of the day are debated.



lwalker@newcoalition.org



19 South LaSalle St., Ste. 903 · Chicago, IL 60603  
312/377-4000  
www.newcoalition.org



## INTERNET INFO

"The Vermont Portfolio Assessment Program: findings and implications," by Daniel Koretz, Brian M. Stecher, Stephen P. Klein, and Daniel F. McCaffrey, RAND Corporation, 1994: <http://www.rand.org/pubs/reprints/RP366/>

"Review of the Measurement Quality of the Kentucky Instructional Results Information System, 1991-1994" by Ronald K. Hambleton et al., released on June 20, 1995 by the Office of Educational Accountability, Kentucky General Assembly, available through PolicyBot™, The Heartland Institute's free online research database. Point your Web browser to <http://www.policybot.org> and search for document #21964.



# Examination of NEA Records Reveals Misdeeds

By Kate McGreevy

The accounting practices of the National Education Association (NEA) could be more transparent in coming years, thanks to a nearly decade-long investigation by the Landmark Legal Foundation into the union's unreported political expenditures.

Landmark, a public-interest law firm, began its NEA Accountability Project 10 years ago in an effort to document inconsistencies in the reporting practices of the education industry's largest labor union.

Eric Christensen, Landmark's vice president for development and communications, described it as a simple but effective approach.

"We basically looked at what the NEA said it did with its funds on tax returns and compared that to what it actually did," Christensen said. "Landmark discovered remarkable differences between the two."

## Illegalsities Uncovered

Labor unions may lawfully use members' dues to pay for political activities, so long as these expenditures are reported. Additionally, while dues would be con-

sidered tax-exempt income, if they are used to fund political activity the union must pay taxes on them.

**"We basically looked at what the NEA said it did with its funds on tax returns and compared that to what it actually did. Landmark discovered remarkable differences between the two."**

**ERIC CHRISTENSEN**  
VICE PRESIDENT FOR DEVELOPMENT  
AND COMMUNICATIONS  
LANDMARK LEGAL FOUNDATION

Phase I of the NEA Accountability Project was designed to expose the national group's practices. It uncovered unreported political expenditures and violations of labor and tax laws. Landmark's work resulted in an ongoing IRS audit of the NEA which began in 2003, as well as an ongoing investigation by the U.S. Department of Labor.

"The first part of our Accountability Project served as a catalyst for changing the reporting requirements for labor unions," said Christensen, noting a major success.

Currently, Landmark is focused on Phase II, which shifts the microscope to state teachers' unions. Complaints against affiliates in several states, including Alabama, California, Michigan, and Wisconsin, have accused unions of failure to pay taxes required by law on political contributions.

## Misdeeds Documented

After examining tax records, other public records, media statements, reports, Web sites, and other sources of information, Landmark files complaints with the IRS or the appropriate state agencies, providing them with evidence of abuses to investigate.

"In California, for example, we examined a complaint related to non-union teachers who were paying dues for services like collective bargaining," Christensen explained. "Only when we looked into it, the union claimed it was using the funds for debt relief, but instead it was using collective bargain-

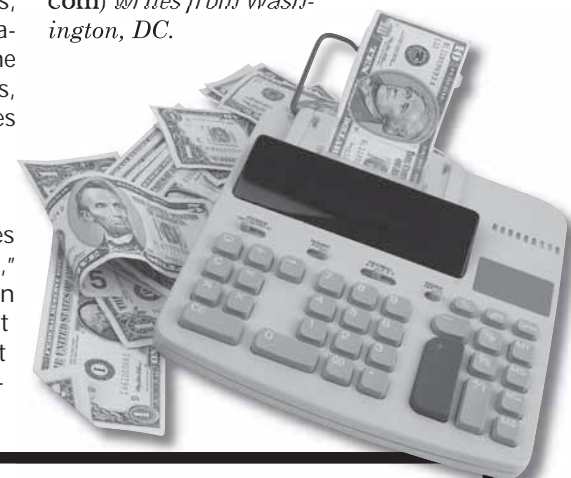
ing fees for political purposes."

Teachers and other stakeholders in the education industry have supported Landmark's efforts, Christensen noted. He stressed Landmark's goal is simply to require the NEA to conform to the same laws as other organizations.

"All too often they report zero political expenditures, but spend teachers' dues on political campaigns," said Christensen. "Our aim is to make the NEA follow the law."

NEA representatives did not return calls for comment.

Kate McGreevy (mcgreevy@gmail.com) writes from Washington, DC.



## There's more to directions than EAST and WEST. THERE'S MORE TO POLITICS THAN LEFT AND RIGHT.

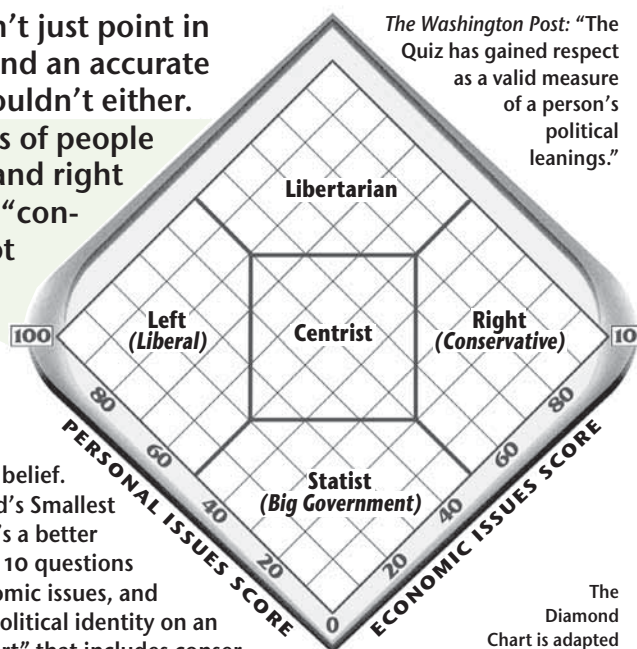
A compass doesn't just point in two directions — and an accurate map of politics shouldn't either. The fact is, millions of people say the labels left and right — or "liberal" and "conservative" — do not properly describe their politics.

No wonder. A simple line from "left" to "right" just isn't detailed enough to include every possible twist and turn of political belief.

That's where the World's Smallest Political Quiz comes in. It's a better "map" of politics. Answer 10 questions about personal and economic issues, and the Quiz pinpoints your political identity on an innovative "Diamond Chart" that includes conservative and liberal — and libertarian, statist, and centrist.

The World's Smallest Political Quiz has been praised

The Washington Post: "The Quiz has gained respect as a valid measure of a person's political leanings."



The Diamond Chart is adapted from an original idea by David Nolan. Chart and questions © Advocates for Self-Government.

by the Washington Post, and more than 9.4 million people have taken it online. What's your real political identity? Take the Quiz. For each statement below, circle A for agree, M for maybe/not sure, and D for disagree. Then find your position on the chart.

## How do you stand on PERSONAL issues?

- |  |    |    |   |
|--|----|----|---|
| ◆ Government should not censor speech, press, media or Internet.   | 20 | 10 | 0 |
| ◆ Military service should be voluntary. There should be no draft.  | A  | M  | D |
| ◆ There should be no laws regarding sex between consenting adults. | A  | M  | D |
| ◆ Repeal laws prohibiting adult possession and use of drugs.       | A  | M  | D |
| ◆ There should be no National ID card.                             | A  | M  | D |

**PERSONAL SCORING:** take 20 for every A, 10 for every M, and 0 for every D: \_\_\_\_\_

## How do you stand on ECONOMIC issues?

- |   |    |    |   |
|---|----|----|---|
| ◆ End "corporate welfare." No government handouts to business.        | 20 | 10 | 0 |
| ◆ End government barriers to international free trade.                | A  | M  | D |
| ◆ Let people control their own retirement: privatize Social Security. | A  | M  | D |
| ◆ Replace government welfare with private charity.                    | A  | M  | D |
| ◆ Cut taxes and government spending by 50% or more.                   | A  | M  | D |

**ECONOMIC SCORING:** take 20 for every A, 10 for every M, and 0 for every D: \_\_\_\_\_

## Find Your Place on the Chart

Mark your PERSONAL score on the lower left scale; your ECONOMIC score on the lower right. Then follow the grid lines until they meet at your political position. The chart shows the political group that agrees with you most. LIBERALS tend to value personal freedom. CONSERVATIVES tend to value economic freedom. LIBERTARIANS value both. STATISTS are against both. CENTRISTS tend to hold different values depending on the issue.

**TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE QUIZ, VISIT: [www.TheAdvocates.org](http://www.TheAdvocates.org)**

# NEA

Continued from page 1

orientation and gender identity in teacher education standards; enhancing gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) partnerships; expanding the union's GLBT Web page; and supporting federal hate crimes legislation.

During the meeting of the Committee on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identification, Jochmann—an NEA convention delegate since 2001 and chair of the NEA Conservative Educators Caucus—said the research and discussion were “one-sided from a gay-affirming viewpoint,” because the committee was “not interested in hearing research contrary to their viewpoint.”

The Board of Directors subsequently adopted the GLBT policies in a closed session, literally behind closed doors.

Conservative teachers must not “sit idly back and pay dues,” Jochmann said. “It’s unconscionable,” she continued, for state members to do nothing while the NEA continues to “adopt non-education policies regarding social issues like abortion and homosexuality.”

NEA spokesperson Will Potter repeatedly declined comment for this article.

**“Rank-and-file teachers are becoming increasingly fed up with the far-left policies the National Association of Education ... so fed up that some of them are planning to become delegates themselves in order to change the union’s makeup.”**

## Need for Accountability

According to the organization’s Web site, approximately one-third of the NEA’s three million teacher members are conservatives.

NEA delegates should more closely represent members’ views and be more accountable to members for the policies they adopt, said Judy Bruns, an Ohio delegate and middle-school teacher. The NEA should institute policies to “ensure annual meeting delegates invite members’ input before attending the meeting and then to report back to members after the meeting,” but her recommendation was defeated, she said.

The NEA is making an effort to reach out to its conservative base, said Diane Len-

ning, former chair of the NEA Republican Educators Caucus and a retired Orange County, California high school teacher. A delegate to the annual meeting each year between 2002 and 2005, this year she was one of 80 teachers attending the NEA’s first Republican Leaders Conference in Minneapolis August 2-5.

An NEA news release said the conference was “part of NEA’s commitment to bipartisanship in its political and legislative advocacy” and its “initiative to increase its presence in [the] Republican Party.”

## Calls for Vouchers

Lenning said she hopes NEA leaders will work to arrive at “common-ground positions” regarding some “historically adversarial issues such as school choice and reauthorization of No Child Left Behind, curriculum content, school safety, improving the high school graduation rate, reducing the dropout rate, and teaching each generation about the processes of democracy.

“When education and political leaders are adversarial and indecisive, the kids suffer,” Lenning added. “We want our students across the nation to succeed with an accessible, quality education.”

Reflecting increasing public dissatisfaction with the NEA’s growing disdain for mainstream American values, some social conservative groups, which histori-

cally have been silent on the issue of school choice, are beginning to take up the banner. One of these is the American Family Association (AFA), based in Mississippi, which asked in a July 31 e-mail alert to its 3.3 million constituents, “is it time for school vouchers?”

“The NEA has consistently passed very leftist resolutions and held very liberal political positions over the years,” so AFA decided to “promote public policies that support a parent’s right to choose their child’s school and to work to raise the profile of politicians who support such policy,” AFA President Tim Wildmon explained. “The vast majority of people who take surveys on our Web site favor vouchers.”

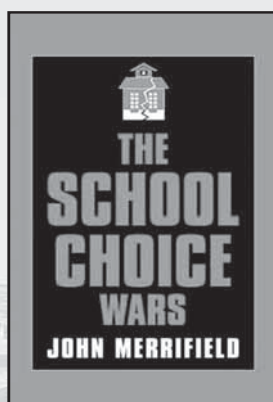
Connie Sadowski ([connie@ceo.austin.org](mailto:connie@ceo.austin.org)) directs the Education Options Resource Center at the Austin CEO Foundation.

## INTERNET INFO

NEA Representative Assembly and Annual Meeting committee recommendations and board implementations, speeches, and slideshow: <http://www.nea.org/annualmeeting/index.html>

## THE SCHOOL CHOICE WARS

John Merrifield



“...my early favorite for Best School Reform Book of 2001. Even school reformers committed to an incrementalist approach will benefit from Merrifield’s instructions on the proper use of rhetoric and the importance of communicating the goal of creating a true competitive education industry.”

—Joseph L. Bast, author of *We Can Rescue Our Children and Rebuilding America’s Schools*, founding publisher of *School Reform News* and president of the Heartland Institute

“...a sharp, punchy, action-oriented book. The author...appears to have read — and cited — every article and study on school choice ever written.”

—The Washington Times

“The book, citing up-to-date research, would be a valuable resource to administrators regardless of where they stand on the issue of school choice.” —THE SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR

What does the term “school choice” mean to you? Opponents of parental choice have muddled its definition, misleading parents and educators and drawing public debate away from the core issues. In a book geared for anyone who wants to better understand this hotly contested topic, Merrifield clarifies the proposals in existence today, defining the key concepts related to choice. Arguing for a competitive education industry, he discusses policy and political strategy mistakes while suggesting corrections. This informative book covers government regulation issues, typical fallacies, diversity issues, private voucher initiatives, and experiments and empirical evidence about competition.

2001, 224 pages

ISBN 0-8108-3956-3 \$23.95 \$19.00 paper

ISBN 0-8108-3953-9 \$51.95 \$42.00 cloth

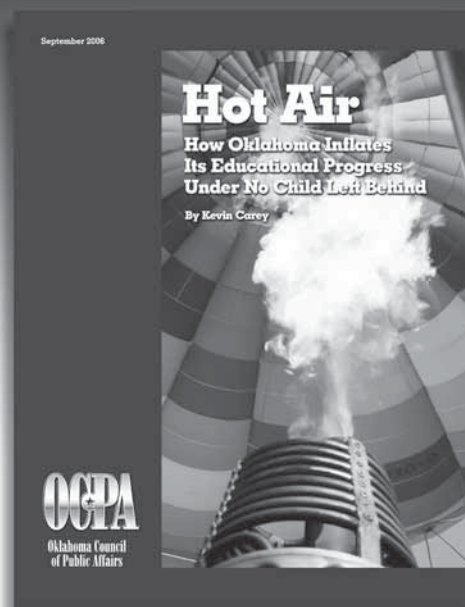
ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD EDUCATION

4501 Forbes Blvd., Ste. 200 Lanham, MD 20706

1-800-462-6420 [www.rowmaneducation.com](http://www.rowmaneducation.com)

Use Promo Code 6F6SCW and Save 20%!

## OKLAHOMANS WANT TO KNOW THE TRUTH



Just released:  
Fall 2006

“...my admiration for their work in Oklahoma continues.”

—Tom Coburn, M.D.  
United States Senator

Please contact us for more information on this publication or any of our other work.  
A member of State Policy Network.

## Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs, Inc.

1401 N. Lincoln Boulevard • Oklahoma City, OK 73104

Office: 405-602-1667 • Fax: 405-602-1238

[www.ocpathink.org](http://www.ocpathink.org) • [ocpa@ocpathink.org](mailto:ocpa@ocpathink.org)



# Stats Tell Truth About the DC Voucher Program

By Matthew Carr and Brent E. Riffel

This June, the U.S. Department of Education's first-year report on the impact of the nation's first federally funded school voucher program, the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP), contained some very good news. Unfortunately, voucher supporters did not sufficiently understand it, and opponents mischaracterized it.

District of Columbia Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton, for example, declared, "Vouchers have received a failing grade."

Media reports about the study seemed to take Norton's point of view as gospel, but the truth may be far from it.

Created by Congress in 2004, the OSP is providing researchers an unprecedented opportunity to examine critical questions involving student achievement, safety, and overall parent and student satisfaction with a voucher program.

What distinguishes this evaluation from many previous efforts to determine vouchers' impact is that students were admitted to the program through a random lottery. The result is an experiment that provides researchers a rare opportunity to study school choice—and in particular a publicly funded voucher program—utilizing the "gold standard" of research methods.

**"[T]he U.S. Department of Education's first-year report on the impact of the nation's first federally funded school voucher program, the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program, contained some very good news."**

## Hyperbolic Rhetoric

Like Norton, other voucher opponents seized on the findings of the first-year evaluation. For example, the interest group People for the American Way (PFAW) released a statement saying the "study lays to rest claims by voucher supporters that publicly funded school vouchers would improve academic achievement."

Such hyperbolic rhetoric is thoroughly unjustified, as these pronouncements are at best premature and at worst a willful misreading of the study. On the other hand, voucher advocates haven't done a very good job highlighting the successes found within the study.

Most have zeroed in on the report's finding that parents who were given the opportunity to choose their child's school



Students rallied on May 15, 2007 to support school choice in Utah. Their counterparts in the District of Columbia depend on choice as their only hope for a high-quality education.

were more satisfied than parents without choices, followed up by rightly cautioning that after only one year it's still too early to tell—and suggesting a "wait and see" attitude regarding achievement impacts.

## Statistical Significance

At issue is the finding that at the end of the first year, using a voucher had "no statistically significant impact, positive or negative, on student reading or math achievement"—a statement found in the executive summary of the report and subsequently reprinted by *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*.

Unfortunately, most observers are not familiar enough with statistical jargon to decipher the full report, and it is unlikely most took the time to read past the executive summary's first few pages. If they had, a few important facts would have merited further discussion.

## Reliable Gains

The first point worth noting is that the term "statistically significant" should not be thrown around so casually by reporters and interest groups.

In simple terms, it refers to a predetermined level of acceptable error. In this case, the federal government requires the level be set at 5 percent, which means the observed difference between voucher and traditional public school students must be sufficiently large that it could be caused by random chance five times of 100.

It turns out that while reading differences were not statistically significant, the gain the voucher students showed in

math had an error-level probability of 7 percent.

To put this in perspective, ask yourself the following: If the weather forecast said there was a 95 percent chance of rain, would you take your umbrella? What if it said there was a 93 percent chance? The difference between 5 and 7 percent does very little to reduce our confidence that a real, positive voucher effect is being observed, just as it does little to change our minds about grabbing the umbrella on the way out the door in the morning.

## Unequal Treatment

It is wrong to treat the government's 95 percent standard as an absolute threshold when the academic community commonly reports statistical findings using a lower threshold of 90 percent confidence, particularly when the research design is rigorous.

To declare a program a failure because of such a small difference in confidence levels makes little sense. Unfortunately, this is an inherent danger in presenting complex statistical reports to policymakers and journalists.

Moreover, the study actually did find some positive effects for vouchers that more than cleared the statistical bar set by the government. When the authors looked at the two-thirds of the sample that entered the program the most prepared to learn, they found statistically significant (at the 97 percent confidence level) gains in math scores.

In other words, the two-thirds of the sample who, according to their higher baseline test scores, had the best chance to adjust to an accelerated learning envi-

ronment outpaced their public school counterparts.

## Rebound Effect

Such a finding is consistent with a multitude of studies that have shown it can take a while for children to rebound from the often negative effect of switching schools.

**"[The DC Opportunity Scholarship Program] provides researchers a rare opportunity to study school choice—and in particular a publicly funded voucher program—utilizing the 'gold standard' of research methods."**

The fact that math gains were statistically significant, even at the federal government's high standard, for the two-thirds of the sample that came into the program the most prepared is a very promising finding that ought to have voucher supporters dancing in the streets.

The folks at PFAW said they have "no expectation that a little thing like 'facts' will stand in the way of [voucher supporters'] anti-public school crusade." Ironically, whether by a lack of understanding or willful ignorance, it appears they are guilty of their own charge.

Matthew Carr ([mjcarr@uark.edu](mailto:mjcarr@uark.edu)) is education policy director at the Buckeye Institute for Public Policy Solutions and a distinguished doctoral fellow at the University of Arkansas. Brent Riffel ([briffel@uark.edu](mailto:briffel@uark.edu)) is a deputy director in the Office for Education Policy, also at the University of Arkansas.

## INTERNET INFO

The executive summary and full text of "Evaluation of the DC Scholarship Program: Impacts after One Year," Institute for Education Statistics, issued in June 2007 by the U.S. Department of Education, are available through *PolicyBot*™, The Heartland Institute's free online research database. Point your Web browser to <http://www.policybot.org> and search for documents #21959 (summary) and #21958 (full text).

## COMMENTARY

# Absence of School Choice Helps Explain Parental Dissatisfaction

By Robert Holland

A poll released July 31 by the Strong American Schools' "ED in '08" campaign found the vast majority of voting-age Americans are deeply worried about U.S. public schools. Almost three-fourths say the public schools have "serious problems," according to the Luntz Maslansky Strategic Research poll.

A vast majority of respondents characterized public schools as either "in crisis" (29 percent) or a "major problem" (45 percent).

**"[O]ne study after another has shown a high level of satisfaction with education among parents who are allowed a choice of schools for their children."**

Less than one-third said they are satisfied with the presidential candidates' positions on children's issues—particularly schools.

That gets to the main point of this release of unsurprising data: To put heat on politicians to pay more attention to education as an issue in the 2008 presidential campaign.

## Neglected Question

But what the activists mostly want is more money for the same failing public school system.

Strong American Schools, a project of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisers, has some hefty backing from the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for its program aimed at getting education high on the candidates' agendas.

A political heavyweight—Roy Romer, former Democratic governor of Colorado and former superintendent of the Los Angeles Unified School District—is chairing the campaign.

With all due respect for these luminaries, their poll would have been a lot more informative and useful if it had asked *why* so many Americans are troubled about public schools. And it would have been good if the pollsters had asked average students what they would like to see done about the problems.

## Satisfied Parents

When one looks at the question from an education consumer's perspective, and seeks to find why some folks are quite satisfied, answers begin to emerge.

The truth is that one study after another has shown a high level of satisfaction with education among parents who are allowed a choice of schools for their children.

University of Wisconsin Prof. John Witte, the official evaluator of the pioneering Milwaukee voucher program, summarized his research this way for a New Orleans newspaper:

"There's one very consistent finding: Parental involvement [in the Milwaukee voucher program] is very positive, and parental satisfaction is very positive. ... [P]arents are happier. The people using vouchers are mostly black and Hispanic and very poor. ... [T]hey deserve the same kind of options that middle-class white people have."

## Proven Advantages

A Manhattan Institute study of another pioneering school choice program—Florida's McKay Scholarships for disabled students—found 93 percent of McKay

recipients were satisfied or very satisfied with their schools of choice. Among parents whose children attended assigned public schools, satisfaction levels were 33 percent or lower.

Other studies in cities such as Charlotte, Cleveland, New York City, San Antonio, and Washington, DC have consistently shown high levels of parental satisfaction when children attend schools of choice, whether publicly or privately funded.

Why are they happy? According to a compilation by the Institute for Justice and other groups, the parents cited the following as some of their favorite things: strong academic programs, teacher skills, school discipline, children's safety, student respect for teachers, moral values, class size, teacher-parent relations, parents' involvement, and the freedom to observe religious traditions.

You could take that list and deduce that the absence of many of those features

helps explain the disaffection turned up by the "ED in '08" panjandrums.

## Powerful Consumers

It is also reasonable to conclude that many were happy customers precisely because they were treated like customers—that is, consumers with the power to move their children to a better school.

A wise political candidate, it would seem, would want not just to put education per se on the '08 agenda, but to emphasize freedom of choice in education. The investors' page of Reuters.com declares under the heading, Parental Dissatisfaction with Public Schools, "about 90 percent of Americans believe parents should have the right to choose their child's school."

You would think that statistic would be striking enough to capture the attention even of candidates who usually count on the backing of those staunch foes of parental choice, the national teacher unions.

Robert Holland (holland@heartland.org) is a senior fellow for education policy with The Heartland Institute.

## INTERNET INFO



"ED in '08" Warns Candidates: Voters Believe America's Schools Are in Serious Trouble," Strong American Schools, July 31, 2007: <http://edin08.com/NewsArchives.aspx?id=1132>

"Parental Satisfaction with School Choice," released in December 2004 by the Institute for Justice, Florida Alliance for Choices in Education, the Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation, and School Choice Wisconsin, is available through PolicyBot™, The Heartland Institute's free online research database. Point your Web browser to <http://www.policybot.org> and search for document #21962.

"Schools: Overview," Reuters.com, August 13, 2007: <http://www.investor.reuters.com/business/IndustryDmDescr.aspx?industry=SCHOOL&target=%2fbusiness%2fbussecindustry%2fbussecindfake%2fbussecindoverview&page=dmdescr>

# THE POWER OF CHOICE

*The Life and Ideas of Milton Friedman*

**Own it on DVD**

[www.ideachannel.com](http://www.ideachannel.com)

# FREE TO CHOOSE

View the entire Free to Choose series online at no charge:

[www.ideachannel.tv](http://www.ideachannel.tv)



# School Choice Book a Quick, Compelling Read

## ***School Choice: The Findings***

By Herb Walberg

Washington, DC: Cato Institute Press, 2007

110 pages, paperback

ISBN: 978-1-933955-04-5, \$9.95

### **Review by Jillian Metz**

Herbert Walberg's latest book, *School Choice: The Findings*, is a great weapon to have in a debate on school choice. Walberg provides readers with empirical ammunition to fight for school choice by presenting scientific studies and statistics that show the power of school choice and its positive impact on America's youth.

Walberg explores several analyses of charter schools, vouchers, and the effects of private schools. He further investigates the downward spiral of the nation's public schools and compares the United States to other countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

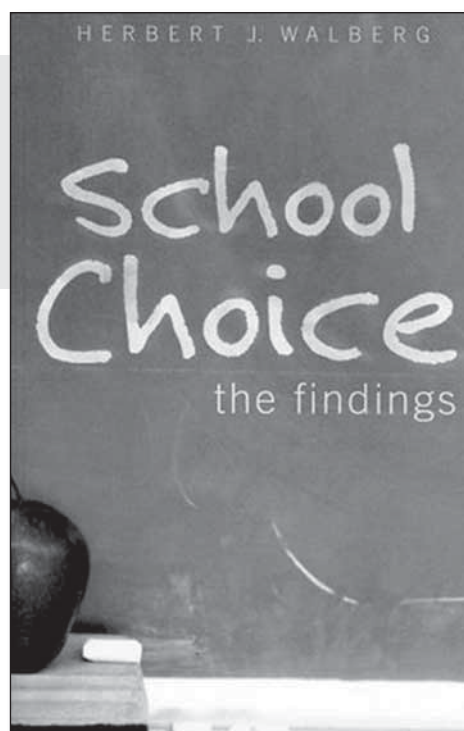
One of Walberg's most compelling chapters is titled "Geopolitical Area Choice Effects," in which he reveals the

barriers preventing American public schools from advancing. He also discusses the ingredients necessary to produce more effective public policy and a more aggressive education system.

### **Informative**

The overall theme of *School Choice:*

*The Findings* is how competition spurs efficiency and effectiveness. The Federal Trade Commission, which traditionally ranks competition in U.S. industries, declares education markets to be "sub-



stantially uncompetitive."

At only 110 pages, the book is a quick read but is heavy on useful statistics and data. Walberg diplomatically presents the facts and informs readers when causal relationships can be accepted based on the parameters of the analysis. The book takes a "roots up" approach, explaining the dynamics of different school choice programs while exploring all available data.

One effect of school choice that has been over-

looked is its effect on graduation rates. The studies reviewed by Walberg focused mainly on achievement tests, but it would be beneficial for readers to observe the influence school choice has had on the

graduation rate crisis as well.

Readers of *School Choice: The Findings* might have benefitted from seeing more of Walberg's personal opinions. He is a distinguished school choice proponent and author, and getting his opinions on the effects of school choice would

**"Walberg provides readers with empirical ammunition to fight for school choice by presenting scientific studies and statistics that show the power of school choice and its favorable impact on America's youth."**

have been both powerful and enlightening. As a project investigator at the Vanderbilt University Center of School Choice, Competition and Achievement, Walberg's predictions for the future of school choice and public education would be immensely valuable to know.

Jillian Metz (jillian.metz@gmail.com) writes from Florida.

## Louisiana

Continued from page 1

No funds for private education may mean no school at all for children put on waiting lists to attend public school, observed Father William Maestri, superintendent of Catholic schools for the Archdiocese of New Orleans.

"Right now, you could go down to certain parts of Orleans Parish, and you could find children at this particular time of the day, playing basketball," Maestri said. "Those children should be in school. But there's no room for these children to go to school."

### **Efforts Failed**

On July 19 Gov. Kathleen Blanco (D) vetoed Senate Bill 45, sponsored by state Sen. Rob Marionneaux (D-Livonia), which would have given parents with children in private schools a tax deduction of up to \$5,000.

Legislators tried to override the veto, but were unable to muster the votes.

House Bill 623, sponsored by state Rep. Steve Scalise (R-Jefferson), was defeated in the House Education Committee on June 5. It would have offered vouchers to parents to help pay private-school tuition.

### **Unions Opposed Choice**

Many who supported the unsuccessful bills say the teachers unions lobbied hard against them.

"Eventually, the teachers union was more interested in looking out for their purse than looking out for the children," Scalise said.

Gene Mills, executive director of the Louisiana Family Forum, a conservative advocacy group based in Baton Rouge, said he thinks the union fears losing money on students who transfer to private schools.

Christian Roselund, communications director for United Teachers of New Orleans, confirmed that impression, saying the public schools sorely need the money that would have been "lost" to private education.

Roselund said the union is not opposed to allowing children to attend whatever school their parents choose. However, he said, they disagree with tax dollars "going to undermine a public school system" by transferring money to private schools.

### **Government Control Lauded**

Although no tax dollars would have been spent on the private schools, Roselund said it makes no difference: "You're just taking it from the pot of money that would go into the government's hands to disperse rather

than taking it later."

Likewise, Les Landen, spokesperson for the Louisiana Federation of Teachers, said public money must be spent on public education.

**"Though Louisiana legislators tried to give tax deductions to parents who want to enroll their children in private schools, their efforts fizzled this summer after one bill was vetoed and another was voted down."**

"I believe that people have every right to send their children to private schools if they wish," Landen said, "but that's an inappropriate use of public funds."

Mills disagreed, pointing out, "It was simply a tax deduction, very minimal, one of the easiest things [Gov. Blanco] could have signed," Mills said. "In a very punitive way, not only did she not sign it, she vetoed it."

Blanco's veto statement said state government's primary responsibility is to

maintain a public education system, and she feared the legislation would subsidize private schools at the expense of public schoolchildren.

### **Moving Forward**

Historically, Louisiana has been an economically poor state with a less-than-competitive education system.

A free-market education system in which parents have choices could fix that by motivating lagging schools to try harder, Mills said.

Maestri sees private options as much-needed relief for children who otherwise won't be taught. Currently, the city's Catholic schools have 15,000 public school transfer students who cannot pay tuition.

"We would work out the finances later," Maestri said. "I'm not worried about the finances. I want children in school."

Maestri also noted that private education—provided to children on public school waiting lists—has brought New Orleans one step closer to recovery.

"Our idea," Maestri said, "was that we needed to have families back, and families bring back all of the things that infrastructure requires so that we can build and go forward."

Jillian Melchior (jmelchior@hillsdale.edu) writes from Michigan.

# A Valuable Primer for Education Reporters

***From Contracts to Classrooms: Covering Teachers Unions***  
 New York: Hechinger Institute, April 2007  
 36 pages, paperback  
 download available at  
[http://cms.ceoi.summitqwest.com/assets/hechinger/pdfs/Hechinger\\_Union\\_Primer.pdf](http://cms.ceoi.summitqwest.com/assets/hechinger/pdfs/Hechinger_Union_Primer.pdf)

## Review by Jim Waters

*From Contracts to Classrooms: Covering Teachers Unions* is written by seasoned reporters who urge their less-experienced colleagues who are just beginning to stomp around the education beat to connect what's occurring at the collective-bargaining table with what's happening—or not happening—in the classroom.

Joe Williams, who covered Milwaukee's private school voucher program for the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* from 1997 to 2000, wrote 11 of the 16 chapters. He masterfully shows unions' effects on teachers—going from “collective begging” to “collective bargaining”—and students, who are suffering.

Williams fairly portrays unions' sparse attempts to become more reform-minded, but he also never lets readers forget that

unions primarily exist not for students' benefit, but to protect teachers.

As the late and colorful American Federation of Teachers President Albert Shanker once said, “When students start paying union dues, I'll start representing students.”

## Verbal Clash

In his chapter, “How Contract Coverage Fails to See the Big Picture,” Richard Lee Colvin, one of the book's six authors, analyzes coverage of teachers unions in major newspapers. He found “terms such as ‘academic standards,’ ‘test scores,’ ‘teacher quality,’ ‘literacy’ or other words that might convey the idea of education quality are largely missing from collective bargaining stories.”

My favorite chapter is “The Education of a Reporter on the Teacher Contract

Beat,” by Dale Mezzacappa, whose 35-year reporting career included being goaded “only once” into a shouting match, which I can appreciate, having spent more than 17 years reporting on obnoxious people doing similarly obnoxious things.

The culprit in this case was a Philadelphia teachers union attorney upset that Mezzacappa's story about a contract settlement following contentious talks between union and district did not explicitly state the union “won.”

***“From Contracts to Classrooms: Covering Teachers Unions is written by seasoned reporters who urge their less-experienced colleagues ... to connect what's occurring at the collective-bargaining table with what's happening—or not happening—in the classroom.”***

During the talks, the union “furiously fought” attempts by the superintendent to reward or sanction schools based on students' progress. That sinner Mezzacappa let both sides spin and claim victory, as usually occurs.

“He got nothing,” the lawyer bellowed about the superintendent.

But Mezzacappa just couldn't help herself. After watching thousands of teachers on the previous night's news broadcast cheering “wildly at the news that ... they'd still get automatic raises even if none of their kids met achievement goals,” she retorted, “If teachers don't improve kids' learning, what are they there for? What should they be judged on? What are they getting paid to do?”

## Selfish Goals

What, indeed?

“Contracts vary some, but all get back to the same thing,” Mezzacappa writes. “[I]t's about hours worked, not results achieved; it's about treating everyone the same, not rewarding excellence; it's about fighting against management, not about working together as colleagues to improve education.”

Still, this book is not just a large gob of union-bashing. Included is a chapter by David Sherman, who for 14 years was vice president of New York City's United Federation of Teachers. This wolf in sheep's clothing manages to keep the

wool mostly on as he offers 10 suggestions new reporters will find helpful in covering teachers unions.

While the suggestions are mostly genuinely helpful, I see part of an uncovered fang when Sherman tries to convince readers that unions are the ones facing resistance from districts regarding education reforms. He claims, “districts are conservative in negotiations because of control issues, and they are reluctant to share decision-making with teachers and parents,” but he offers no examples.

## Ruthless Persistence

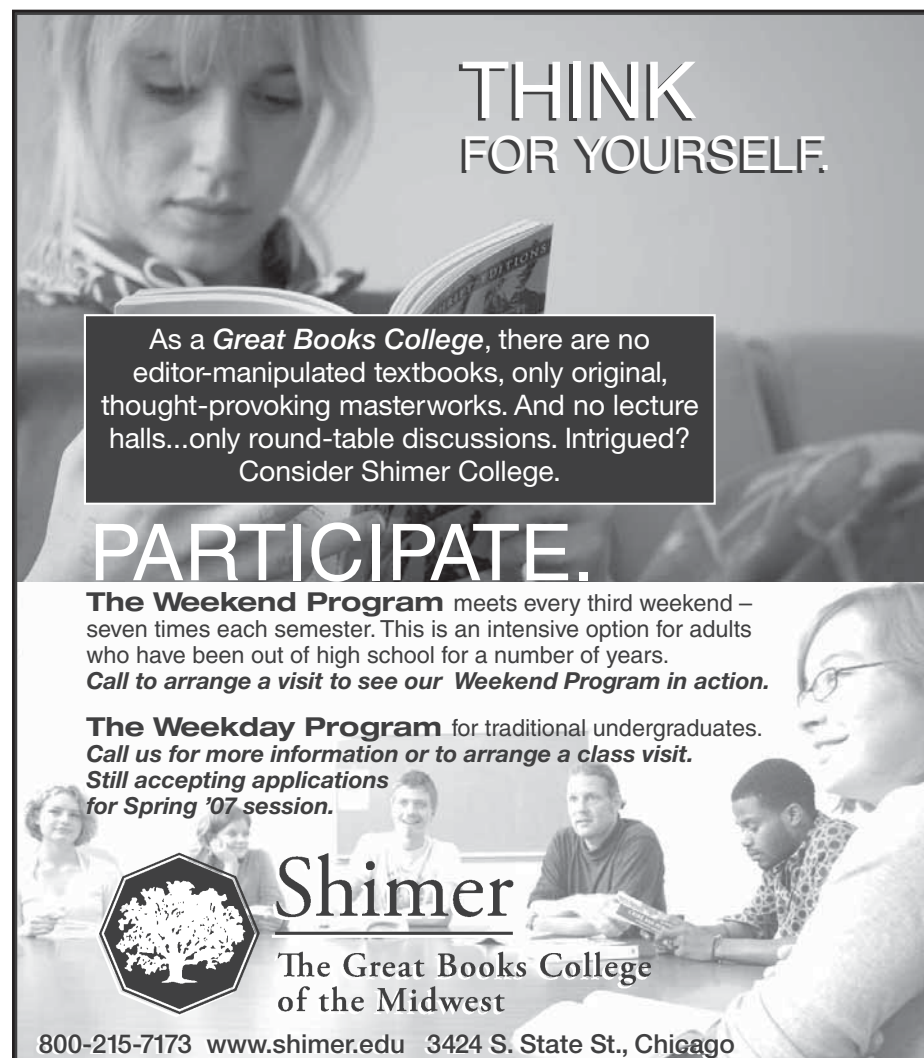
The book includes examples of an increasingly dogged determination by education reporters to get beyond the usual blubber.

Scott Reeder, an Illinois reporter, filed 1,500 Freedom of Information Act requests with 876 school districts after a union leader challenged him to find statistics to counter the union's claim that “their underperforming teachers were routinely fired.”

What Reeder found was that 93 percent of Illinois school districts have not given any tenured teacher an “unsatisfactory” job evaluation in the past decade, and that 50 percent of tenured teachers receiving substandard marks are still teaching.

What other explosive information is available—and how much could public education feel the proper pressure to improve—if all education reporters read this book and then fused Mezzacappa's passion with Reeder's persistence?

*Jim Waters (jwaters@bipps.org) is director of policy and communications at the Bluegrass Institute for Public Policy Solutions in Bowling Green, Kentucky.*




**THINK FOR YOURSELF.**

As a **Great Books College**, there are no editor-manipulated textbooks, only original, thought-provoking masterworks. And no lecture halls...only round-table discussions. Intrigued? Consider Shimer College.

**PARTICIPATE.**

**The Weekend Program** meets every third weekend – seven times each semester. This is an intensive option for adults who have been out of high school for a number of years.  
**Call to arrange a visit to see our Weekend Program in action.**

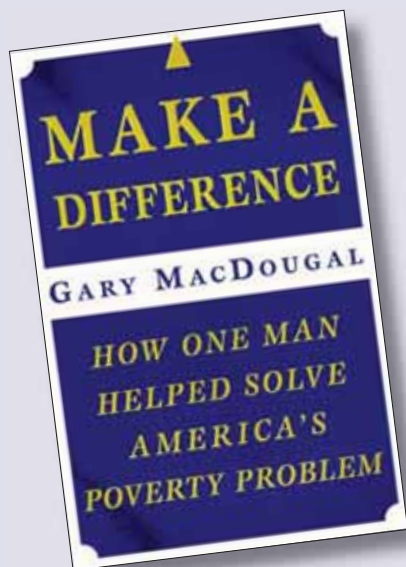
**The Weekday Program** for traditional undergraduates.  
**Call us for more information or to arrange a class visit.**  
**Still accepting applications for Spring '07 session.**

 **Shimer**  
 The Great Books College of the Midwest

800-215-7173 [www.shimer.edu](http://www.shimer.edu) 3424 S. State St., Chicago







# HAS YOUR STATE REDUCED ITS WELFARE ROLLS BY 86%?

Available for purchase through The Heartland Institute's online store at [www.heartland.org](http://www.heartland.org) or call 312/377-4000.

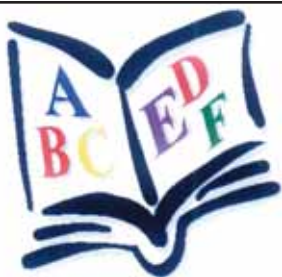
A limited number of **COMPLIMENTARY COPIES** are also available to elected officials and their staff.  
Send your request by fax on office stationery to 312/377-5000.

*Make a Difference* is both a compelling memoir and convincing proof that we now know important answers to help solve America's poverty problem—without spending any more of the taxpayers' money.

Author Gary MacDougal spent years working in Illinois inner cities and rural communities—talking with “ladies in the backyard,” befriending community leaders, and working with local organizations in his quest to find solutions that have long eluded academic researchers and politicians. As chairman of the Governor's Task Force on Human Services Reform, MacDougal was the catalyst for the complete overhaul of the state's welfare system, which included the largest reorganization of state government since 1900.

Eight years after MacDougal's suggestions were implemented, Illinois now stands well ahead of California, New York, and other big-city states, with a spectacular 86 percent reduction in the welfare rolls since reform implementation in 1996, second only to Wyoming among all fifty states. The welfare rolls in Chicago's Cook County have been reduced an amazing 85 percent, with studies showing that most who left the rolls are working, and at pay above minimum wage.

MacDougal's extraordinary journey shows the way for the rest of the nation and proves there are ways we can all help provide a ladder of opportunity for those in poverty. We each can *Make a Difference* in the ongoing effort to end America's poverty problem.



## Early Reading Initiative, NFP

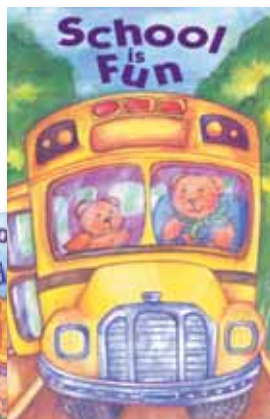
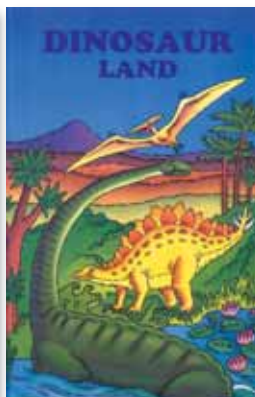
PO Box 1583 Wheaton, IL 60189-1583 • phone: 866-219-4465 fax: 866-251-0560 • [early\\_reading\\_init@yahoo.com](mailto:early_reading_init@yahoo.com)

Each high-quality, hard covered, personalized edition will reflect

- First name and gender of the student (for privacy reasons we do not work with last names)
- Teacher's name
- School name and hometown

**Motivating and Stimulating Young Readers  
Through Personalized Children's Books**

**Receive a **FREE** edition  
personalized with your school's information  
(limit one per school)**



### SPONSORS and PTAs

Call us to see how we can structure your donation  
866-219-4465

Over 30 titles are available and adaptable to your school setting. **Many can be provided in Spanish for your immersion classes.** Additional titles include Jesus the Provider®, Noah's Ark®, Baby Jesus®, My Jewish Holidays®, Kwanzaa®, African-American Heros®, and Dinosaur Land®.

We are recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as a 501(c)(3) organization.

---

---

★

# THE HEARTLAND INSTITUTE'S 23<sup>RD</sup> ANNIVERSARY BENEFIT DINNER

---

---

★



**WHEN:**

Thursday, October 25, 2007  
5:00 pm - 9:30 pm

**WHERE:**

Hilton Chicago Hotel  
720 South Michigan Avenue  
Chicago, Illinois

**REGISTER:**

online at [www.heartland.org](http://www.heartland.org) or call  
312 377 4000 and ask for Events  
Manager Nikki Comerford.

**ABRAHAM LINCOLN:  
FRIEND OR FOE OF FREEDOM?**



The Heartland Institute will debate the legacy of Illinois' all-time favorite son, Abraham Lincoln, and celebrate the 23rd anniversary of its founding on Thursday, October 25, from 5:00 p.m. to 9:30 p.m., at the Hilton Chicago Hotel.

Joseph A. Morris, president of the Lincoln Legal Foundation, will debate Thomas J. DiLorenzo, author of *Lincoln Unmasked* and *The Real Lincoln*, on the topic, "Was Abraham Lincoln a friend or foe of American freedom?"

Reception starts at 5:00 p.m., dinner is served at 7:00 p.m., and the debate starts at 7:45 p.m. A dessert reception with open bar follows.

**EARLIER THAT DAY:  
EMERGING ISSUES FORUM**

Please join us on Thursday, October 25, from 7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., at Chicago's Newberry Library, as we explore emerging issues in state public policies in the areas of health care, education, environmental protection, and more. The Emerging Issues Forum is a day-long opportunity for elected officials, policy analysts, and government affairs staffs to confer about the top public policy issues of the day.

ECONOMY, EDUCATION,  
ENVIRONMENT,  
HEALTH CARE,  
TECHNOLOGY,  
WELFARE REFORM

**SPECIAL OFFER  
FOR ELECTED OFFICIALS**

Admission to both events is free for elected officials and their spouses. A limited number of travel scholarships are also available. For more information or to reserve a place, please call 312 377 4000 or send an email to Government Relations Director Trevor Martin at [tmartin@heartland.org](mailto:tmartin@heartland.org).



---

---

OPEN BAR · COMEDIAN TIM SLAGLE · LINCOLN DEBATE · DESSERT BAR

---

---

The Heartland Institute is a 23-year-old national nonprofit organization based in Chicago. Its mission is to discover, develop, and promote free-market solutions to social and economic problems. For more information, visit our Web site at [www.heartland.org](http://www.heartland.org) or call 312 377 4000.