

School Reform News

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Arizona School Choice Foes File 'Most Frivolous Lawsuit Ever'



By Jim Waters

Arizona may be a leader in the school choice movement, but that hasn't stopped opponents from continuing to mount legal challenges against the state's tax credit programs.

The latest confrontation came on

September 17, when the Arizona School Boards Association (ASBA), ACLU of Arizona, and Arizona Center for Law in the Public Interest argued against the constitutionality of the state's tuition tax credit programs before the state's Court of Appeals.

The Arizona chapter of the Institute

for Justice (IJ), which represents parents and Arizona School Choice Trust, one of the state's scholarship-granting organizations, defended the tax credit programs. The state has one each for corporations and individuals.

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School Supplies

U.S. House Passes No Child Left Inside Act

The House of Representatives has passed the No Child Left Inside Act of 2008, authorizing \$14 million in 2009 for the implementation of "environmental literacy" programs. *page 3*

California to Remove Questionable Teachers from Classrooms

California classrooms may soon be safer thanks to a pair of new laws signed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger. *page 6*

School Choice Gains Advocates in Florida

School reform observers were surprised—and some downright skeptical—when the Florida School Choice Fund hired two formerly outspoken critics of choice. *page 10*

New Pittsburgh Grading Policy Deemed Deceptive, Bad for Students

Education analysts are criticizing a Pittsburgh Public Schools policy requiring students to receive 50 percent credit for work not turned in. *page 14*

Connecticut Hit by Wave of Sweeping Reform Proposals

With inflation-adjusted education costs having doubled in 25 years, Connecticut is in the midst of a wave of unusually sweeping reform plans. *page 18*

Georgia Lawmaker Lays Groundwork for Universal School Choice Bill



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January	School Safety
February	Literacy
March	National History Month
April	Catholic Education
May	National Science Month
June	Higher Education
July	skip month
August	skip month
September	Back to School
October	Math Education
November	Charter Schools
December	Homeschooling



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HILLBEAT

U.S. House Passes No Child Left Inside Act

By Lindsey Burke

The U.S. House of Representatives has passed the No Child Left Inside Act of 2008, amending the National Environmental Education Act and authorizing \$14 million in 2009 for the implementation of “environmental literacy” programs.

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimates the legislation will raise discretionary spending by \$24 million between 2009 and 2012. At press time, the bill was headed to the U.S. Senate for consideration.

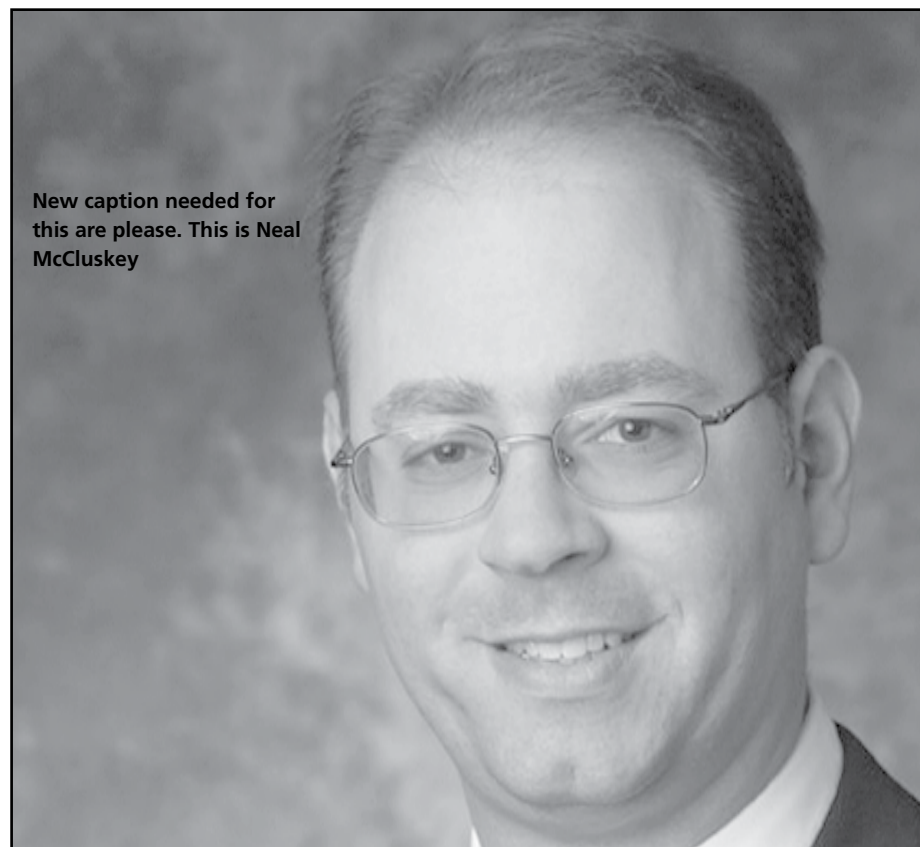
If implemented, the legislation, passed by the House in September, would require states to submit environmental literacy plans to the U.S. Department of Education in order to receive additional funding provided in the bill.

**“If implemented, the legisla-
tion ... would require states
to submit environmental
literacy plans to the U.S.
Department of Education in
order to receive additional
funding provided in the
bill.”**

State environmental education plans would have to meet nationally determined objectives such as preparing students to understand climate change and natural disaster resilience, reducing the risk of “nature-deficit disorder”—alleged child behavioral problems resulting from insufficient time spent outdoors—and improving teachers’ knowledge of environmental content.

States would be required to include specific content, courses, and environmental literacy assessment methods in their plans. The bill also includes provisions for promoting the environmental education teaching profession.

New caption needed for
this are please. This is Neal
McCluskey



Expanding Government Control

In order to receive grant funds, state environmental education plans would be subject to oversight by the U.S. Department of Education.

To be eligible for funding, would work in conjunction with state education officials natural resource agencies to craft a K-12 plan that teaches students about environmental challenges, reduces the risk of nature-deficit disorder, and provides opportunities for professional development.

The bill has the support of environmental groups such as the National Wildlife Federation and teacher unions such as the National Education Association. They note children today spend far less time outdoors than did previous generations. Proponents of the bill claim it will help combat problems such as hyperactivity and obesity resulting from excessive time spent indoors.

Opponents of the bill, however, say requiring students to display “environmental competency” as a prerequisite for graduation would expand the government’s role in education and indoctrinate children in a particular political agenda.

Federal Giveaway to Activists

Neal McCluskey, associate director of the Center for Educational Freedom at the Cato Institute in Washington, DC, said the bill is little more than a federal handout to environmental interest groups.

“There’s no question what this bill is: A federal giveaway to Gore-esque envi-

ronmental activists,” McCluskey said.

“If parents want their children to learn about threats to the environment, that’s fine, but environmentalists should have to compete in the marketplace of ideas, not be handed federal bucks and captive audiences by sympathetic politicians. But this is what we get when we ignore the Constitution and let the feds into our schools,” McCluskey continued.

Big-Government Albatross

Critics note the bill does not address the academic crisis facing many of the nation’s public school children.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, one-third of the nation’s fourth-graders scored below basic in reading in 2007, as did 26 percent of eighth-graders. Mathematics comprehension is not much better, with nearly 30 percent of eighth-graders scoring below basic. Nationally, graduation rates languish around 74 percent.

U.S. Rep. Pete Hoekstra (R-MI) voted against the bill, which he said “creates a new, unnecessary program at the Department of Education, adds additional layers of bureaucracy, and mandates that teachers divert their attention from other core subjects.

“It would implement a new policy that would be just as difficult to monitor from Washington as No Child Left Behind,” Hoekstra concluded.

Lindsey Burke (lindsey.burke@heritage.org) is a research assistant in domestic policy studies at The Heritage Foundation in Washington, DC.

Arizona School Choice Foes File 'Most Frivolous Lawsuit Ever'

Continued from page 1

Trying to Thwart Choice

School choice opponents were appealing a March 2007 decision by the Maricopa County Superior Court throwing out the group's third lawsuit against scholarship tax credits in the state.

The latest suit was filed in September 2006 after Arizona lawmakers approved expanding the state's successful individual tax credit program to include donations by corporations, which were capped last year at \$14.4 million.

In a statement following the filing of the appeal, Tim Keller, executive director of IJ's Arizona chapter, called it "the most frivolous lawsuit ever filed against a parental choice program."

Neither side would speculate on when the appeals court might render its decision.

Constitutionality Questioned

Christopher Thomas, general counsel for ASBA, who is representing his group in the lawsuit, argues the law violates the state constitution because it allows public funds to end up in private, particularly religious, schools.

"It certainly violates, if not the letter, then the spirit of the law," Thomas said.

Article 9, Section 10 of the Arizona state constitution states, "No tax shall be laid or appropriation of public money made in aid of any church, or private or sectarian schools, or any public service corporation."

Calls Credit a Tax

That, says Thomas, is "more distinct and more direct in terms of separation of church and state" than the U.S. Constitution. He also claims the provision means what had been thought to be precedent rulings in other school choice cases don't fully apply here.

For example, Thomas said that while he "agreed with" the U.S. Supreme Court's decision upholding the constitutionality of Cleveland's voucher pro-

gram in *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris*, a "constitutional provision" would need to be approved by voters before Arizona's school choice programs are "on firm legal ground."

Proponents are trying to establish similar legal precedent for "a more-expansive [school choice] program" in Arizona, Thomas said.

"Where you have a separate state constitution that is distinct, it still has to pass our state constitution," Thomas said. "Look at the plain text of our constitution. It says 'no tax in the aid of private or sectarian schools.'"

"[S]tate tax credits for the scholarship programs saved taxpayers around \$5 million last year alone, and could reap savings of \$57 million during the programs' first five years."

'Irrelevant' Arguments

IJ attorneys said opponents' arguments are irrelevant when it comes to tax credits.

"Giving tax credits is not the same as appropriating funds for public schools," IJ attorney Dick Komer explained. "The money gets to schools in a removed manner. First, the individual or corporation makes their donation, then the scholarship is awarded to the family, and finally the money is received by private schools to pay for tuition."

Komer said opponents' arguments are the same ones rejected by several courts in the past.

"They want to get the earlier ruling overturned," Komer said.

In October 1999, the U.S. Supreme Court turned down an appeal of a decision by the Arizona Supreme Court, which had upheld the program under both the state and federal constitutions earlier that year.



However, the U.S. Supreme Court later ruled the case could be challenged in the federal courts.

In 2005 the Arizona Civil Liberties Union appealed a U.S. District Court judge's ruling upholding tax credits as constitutional and granting IJ's motion to dismiss. The case is pending in the Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

Scholarships = State Savings

In a new survey of 14 of Arizona's 19 school tuition organizations (STOs), education researcher Vicki Murray estimates combined state tax credits for the scholarship programs saved taxpayers around \$5 million last year alone, and could reap savings of \$57 million during the programs' first five years.

According to the survey, released in October, nearly \$12 million in combined state tax credits for scholarship donations last year made it possible for nearly 2,000 children from low- and moderate-income families to attend private school. Without scholarships, those students, who came from households with an average annual income of \$35,533 during the 2007-08 school year, would likely have been forced to return to their previous schools at a combined cost of more than \$17 million.

Choice Bills Defeated

During this year's legislative session, Thomas's group opposed school choice bills in both the House and Senate, including HB 2098, which would have made the corporate tuition tax credit to private schools permanent. A 29-29 vote caused the measure to fail.

The groups also vigorously opposed expanding the state's voucher program for disabled children. SB 1025 would have allowed the Arizona Department of Education to grant scholarships to students who did not meet the current requirement

of having spent the prior year in an Arizona public school due to a medical crisis requiring hospitalization.

Accountability Dispute

Thomas claims his group does not reject outright all forms of educational choice.

"We lead the country in choice," Thomas said. "We have the most expansive charter school system in the country. But these are public schools that still have to adhere to public accountability; they still have to be accountable for how they spend their money and have to administer the state-required tests just like all the other public schools."

But Komer said that's a policy debate, not a valid legal argument.

"The law didn't say if a school's not accountable, it can't be done," Komer said.

"Still, the only reasons we have accountability measures in the public schools is that without them, there would be no accountability," Komer continued. "Parents, on the other hand, hold private schools accountable. That's the best kind of accountability possible."

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

INTERNET INFO

"Arizona School Tuition Organization Association Survey of Corporate Tuition Tax-Credit Scholarship Recipients' Family Income: School Years 2006-07 and 2007-08," by Vicki Murray, Pacific Research Institute, October 2008: <http://astoa.com/index.php>

Support for Educational Choice Is Strong in Maryland, Poll Shows

By Michael Coulter

A new poll indicates Maryland residents are far from satisfied with their public schools and want their legislators to allow alternatives.

The poll found only 17 percent of Maryland voters consider their public schools to be good or excellent, and only 18 percent would choose a regular public school if they could have their choice of any type of educational program.

'Interesting Disconnect'

Paul DiPerna, director of partner services for the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, said the answer to the question about parents' preferences stood out to him as the most significant finding of the poll, because those preferences differ greatly from where students actually go to school.

"There is an interesting disconnect between preferences and the real-world constraints set up by the government or others," DiPerna said.

"Parents are not satisfied with public schools—even with Maryland's recent legislation that has increased education spending by \$1.3 billion. Will lawmakers continue to protect these status quo schools?"

**CHRIS SUMMERS, PRESIDENT
MARYLAND PUBLIC POLICY INSTITUTE**

The poll was conducted by Strategic Vision, an Atlanta-based public affairs agency, on behalf of the Friedman Foundation in Indianapolis and Agudath Israel of Maryland, the Black Alliance for Educational Options, Maryland Council for American Private Education, Hispanic Council for Reform and Educational Options, Maryland Catholic Conference, National Catholic Educational Association, Mid-Atlantic Catholic Schools Consortium, and Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America.

The telephone poll, conducted with 1,200 households between June 27 and June 29, carries a +/- 3 percent margin of error and was released August 28.

Entrepreneurial Opportunities

While only about 10 percent of Maryland's students currently attend private school, according to DiPerna, the results show about 45 percent of parents in the state would like to send their children to one.

That's the second-highest percentage of any state the Friedman Foundation has surveyed on this topic so far. A survey of Nevada residents released in January 2008 indicated 48 percent of Nevadans would like to send their kids to a private school.

"That nearly half of Maryland residents would want to send their kids to private schools shows that there is [little] support for the status quo," DiPerna said.

As a result, DiPerna said, Maryland is fertile ground for entrepreneurs who want to provide education alternatives. The respondents who would like to send their child to a private school were nearly evenly divided between desiring a religious school and a non-religious one.

Bipartisan Call for Reform

Another significant finding, DiPerna said, is the bipartisan nature of the responses to the questions.

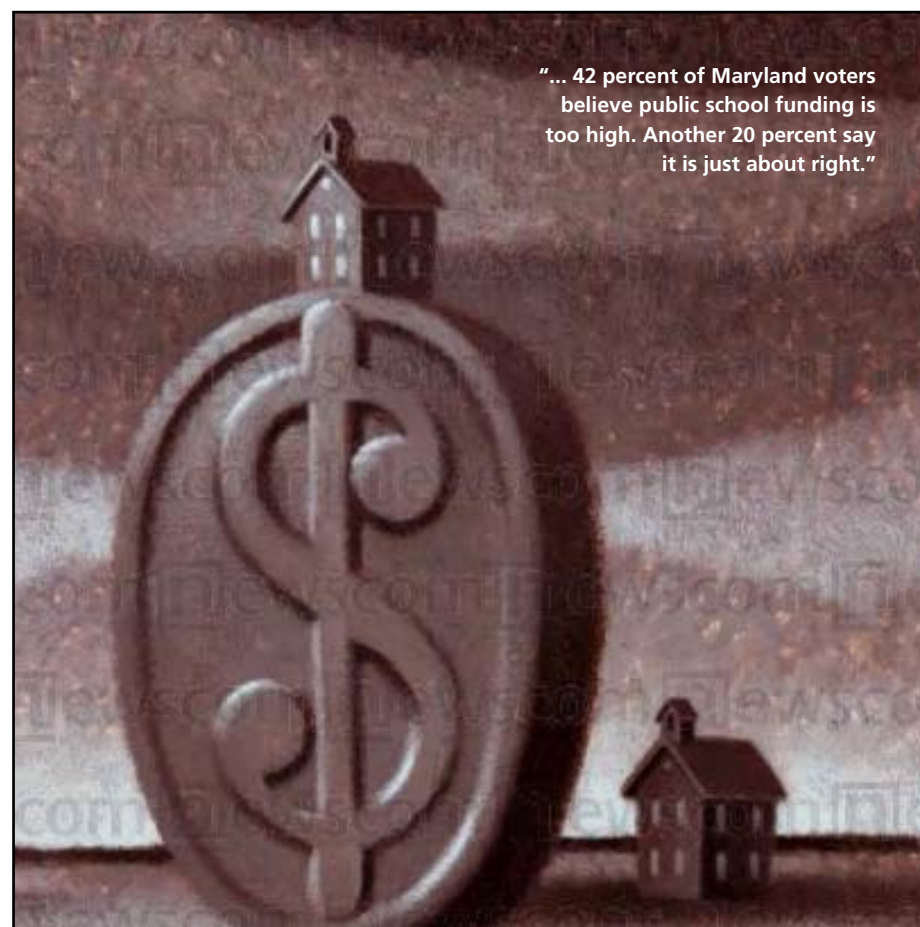
A little more than 50 percent of both Republicans and Democrats each favor tax-credit scholarships. About 40 percent of Republicans, Democrats, and independents favor school vouchers and charter schools, and one-third of Republicans, Democrats, and independents support virtual schools.

Another key finding of the survey is that 42 percent of Maryland voters believe public school funding is too high. Another 20 percent say it is just about right.

Though Maryland public schools spent \$12,230 per student in 2006 (the latest year for which figures were available), most respondents had no idea what the actual figure is—only 8 percent of respondents believed it was more than \$10,000. That means voters think the state should be spending far less per student than it actually does.

'Very Positive News'

"This poll is very positive news, and it's something we at the Maryland Public Policy Institute have been suspecting for a long time," said Chris Summers, president of MPPI, a policy research organization based in Rockville. "Parents are not satisfied with public



"... 42 percent of Maryland voters believe public school funding is too high. Another 20 percent say it is just about right."

schools—even with Maryland's recent legislation that has increased education spending by \$1.3 billion.

"Will lawmakers continue to protect these status quo schools?" Summers asked. "The needs of the institution and school systems come first for legislators, and the needs of students and parents are far down on the list."

In an August 28 press statement by the Maryland Nonpublic Schools Legislative Coalition, Henry Fortier, president of the Maryland Council for American Private Education, said, "The poll results don't say that one system is better than another, but rather it's to everyone's advantage to give families high-quality, affordable educational options."

"We're encouraged to see that the concept of the business tax credit for scholarships is a winner with voters in Maryland," Ariel Sadwin, director of Agudath Israel of Maryland, said in the same release. "Our hope is that the Maryland legislature will support all students and families in Maryland, regardless of where they attend school."

"If anything, the takeaway from this

poll is that Marylanders suffer from a lack of information—or worse, a campaign of misinformation—when it comes to possible options for expanding parents' educational choices," Maryland Catholic Conference Deputy Director Mary Ellen Russell said in another August 28 press release. "When given proper information about the benefits that a diverse educational system provides, it's clear that voters are open to supporting all students and families, regardless of where their children attend school."

Michael Coulter (think@heartland.org) writes from Pennsylvania.

INTERNET INFO

"Maryland's Opinion on K-12 Education and School Choice," Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, et al., August 28, 2008: <http://www.friedmanfoundation.org/friedman/research/ShowResearchItem.do?id=10098>

New California Laws Will Remove Questionable Teachers from Classrooms

By Aricka Flowers

California classrooms may soon be safer thanks to a pair of new laws signed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger (R).

The bills are designed to close loopholes that allowed teachers accused or even convicted of sexual misconduct or drug crimes to work in public school classrooms. The measures were spurred by a 2007 Associated Press report that found 25 percent of all disciplinary actions against teachers nationwide involved sexual misconduct.

The report revealed more than 300 California teachers had their licenses suspended or revoked for sexual misconduct.

"Why a group who represents teachers would want a sex offender teaching in the classroom is beyond me. The ACLU is one thing, but for a teachers union to oppose a measure designed to make our schools safer is just plain baffling."

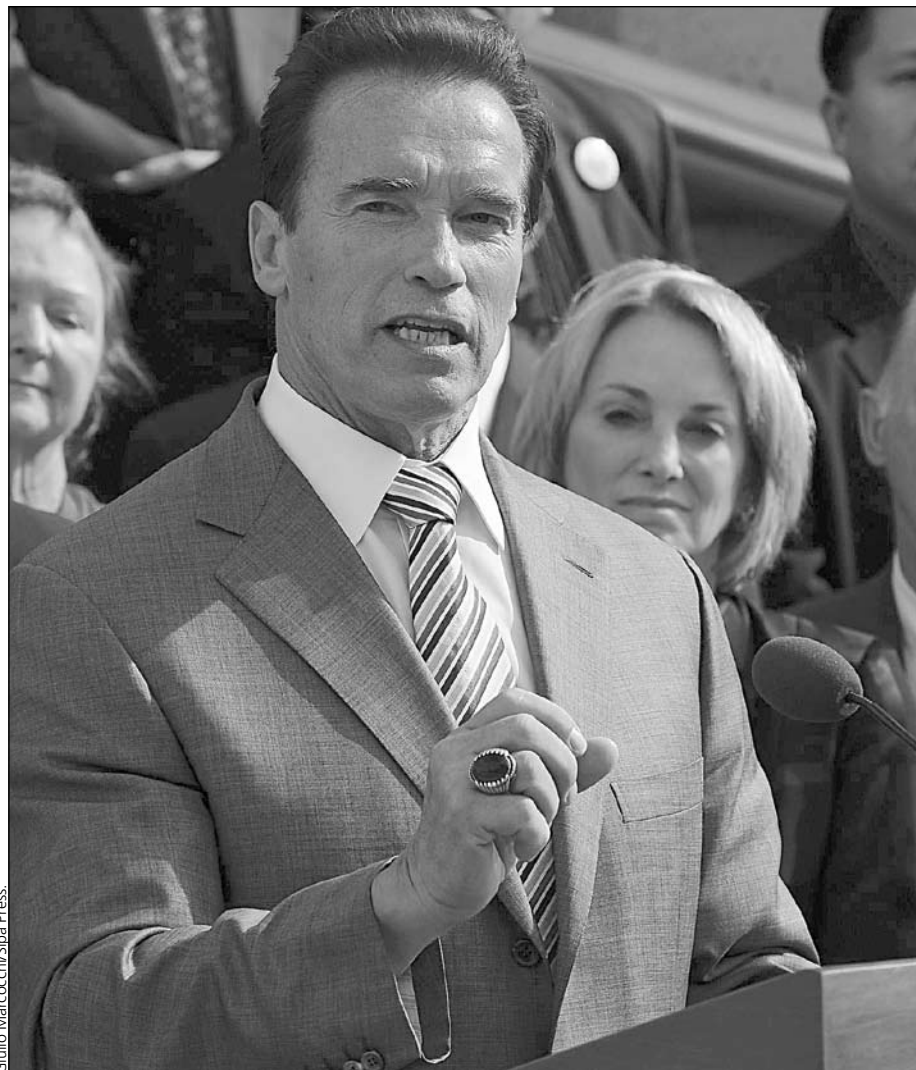
BOB MARGETT
STATE SENATOR
GLENDDORA, CALIFORNIA

Protecting Kids

State Sen. Bob Margett (R-Glendora) introduced SB 1105, which prevents teachers who plead no contest to sex or drug crimes from teaching in California classrooms. Prior to the new law, teachers were allowed to continue working with students while the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) conducted an investigation.

State Sen. Jack Scott (D-Pasadena) also targeted suspect teachers with his bill, SB 1110.

"Basically, this law reads that if another state has revoked a teaching license for bad behavior or misconduct, the California Commission on Teaching Credentials has to immediately suspend their license while conducting an investigation," said Scott's spokesperson, Wendy Gordon. "If you look at the original language of the bill, you'll see that the initial goal was to be even harsher and revoke the license in California altogether."



Giulio Marcocci/Sipa Press

California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has signed into law two measures aimed at protecting students from classroom teachers accused of drug crimes or sex offenses.

The new law also calls for revocation of a teaching license if the educator has been convicted of a crime that includes a "no contact with minors" provision.

"SB 1110 ensures that educators who have engaged in serious misconduct are quickly removed from the schools, while at the same time allowing the CTC to determine their fitness to maintain a valid California credential," Scott said in an August press release. "The measure has been crafted to protect our students and protect the due process rights of the credential holder."

Schwarzenegger signed the two laws in late September. SB 1105 is scheduled to take effect in January 2009. The rules outlined in SB 1110 already have been added to the state's education code.

School Adjustments Necessary

Evelyn Stacey, a research associate in

education studies at the Pacific Research Institute, a research group with offices in Sacramento and San Francisco, says the new laws are a great way to make schools safer.

"It sounds like the teachers association doesn't like the laws because of the amount of evidence needed to revoke a credential," Stacey said. "Overall, from what I know about teacher unions, they don't like changing the way things are, and their job is to protect teachers."

"If more teachers are being accused of sexual misconduct or other behavior than are actually guilty, then it's not a good law for them," Stacey continued. "If teachers are removed from schools due to these laws, they will have to find new teachers to substitute at the last minute, which is hard because there is a shortage of ready-to-go teachers. It sounds like their argument is that they want the teachers to work while under



"SB 1110 ensures that educators who have engaged in serious

misconduct are quickly removed from the schools ... The measure has been crafted to protect our students and protect the due process rights of the [teaching] credential holder."

JACK SCOTT
STATE SENATOR
PASADENA, CALIFORNIA

investigation—sort of an innocent-until-proven-guilty kind of thing."

Advocacy Groups Opposed Change

The Association of California School Administrators, the California School Boards Association, and Los Angeles Unified School District, the nation's largest school district, supported the laws' passage, but the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and California Teachers Association (CTA) did not.

Margett had some harsh words for the teachers union.

"Why a group who represents teachers would want a sex offender teaching in the classroom is beyond me," Margett stated in an August press release. "The ACLU is one thing, but for a teachers union to oppose a measure designed to make our schools safer is just plain baffling."

CTA did not respond to calls for comment on its position.

Aricka Flowers (atflowers2@gmail.com) writes from Chicago.

INTERNET INFO

"AP: Sexual Misconduct Plagues US Schools," by Martha Irvine and Robert Tanner, The Associated Press, October 21, 2007: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/10/21/AR2007102100144.html>

Jewish Groups Lobby for Federal School Choice Bill

By Evelyn B. Stacey

Forty-four years after the signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, a new rights movement is gathering steam as ethnic groups are increasingly joining forces to press for school choice. Jewish groups have taken a prominent role in the effort.

The Civil Rights Act of Equal Educational Opportunity (CRA of EEO) is a proposal for a federal bill to establish freedom for all parents to choose their child's school, public or non-public.

Though federal legislators have yet to draft such a bill, parents and community leaders are working together to inform the public that attending the school the government chooses for children doesn't mean a quality education will be provided.

Forced Into Public Schools

School choice has become an issue among Jewish communities throughout New York and New Jersey for two reasons. Private schools in both states have been unable to keep tuition costs low enough to keep student bodies growing, causing many to close, and Jewish families tend to emphasize the importance of education.

As a result of the closings, many Jewish families are facing the reality that their only option is to send their children to neighborhood public schools, which do not offer the same standards of achievement and discipline as the private schools they prefer.

Civil Right

Like other minority groups, Jewish communities have



Rabbi Israel Teitelbaum advocates for school choice.

cherished the rights codified in the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The idea of allowing inner-city children the same opportunities as those in suburban schools has stirred up strong emotions.

"Americans insist on equality of opportunity in housing, employment, and public accommodations, yet we trample upon this right where it hurts us most—the raising and nurturing of our children," said Rabbi Israel Teitelbaum, cofounder of Parents for Free Choice in Education, a non-profit grassroots group based in Morristown, New Jersey that advocates giving all parents nationwide the ability

to choose their children's schools.

"This is not just a fight for school choice at just the state level, but ultimately at the federal level," Teitelbaum said.

Growing Movement

In order to advance Teitelbaum's efforts in New York, Yosef Hayon, a former Jewish private school teacher now working for the Sephardic Voters League in New York City, is urging federal legislators to push for a federal parental choice bill as well.

"Every parent, every teacher, and every staff member who works at a private school supports school choice," said Hayon.

Hayon's work with the Sephardic Voters League has led more than 30 rabbis in the New York metro area to declare their support for a federal school choice initiative. Approximately 2,000 Jewish families in New York City send their children to private schools.

"These families are paying \$7,000 for property taxes and then \$7,000 for tuition," Hayon said. "[These] families end up paying for tuition twice in our current system."

Numerous organizations, including the National Committee for the Furtherance of Jewish Education, N'shei Chabad, New Jersey Family Policy Council, and SchoolChoiceVoter.org, have announced their support for a federal school choice bill.

Evelyn B. Stacey (estacey@pacificresearch.org) is a research associate in education studies at the Pacific Research Institute, a policy research group in California.



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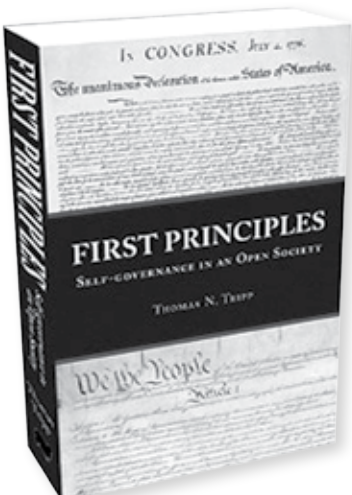
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Georgia Lawmaker Lays Groundwork for New Universal School Choice Bill

Continued from page 1

"I think there's a willingness in the legislature to consider some fairly aggressive reforms," said Johnson. He noted efforts to increase funding by reducing class sizes and providing across-the-board salary increases to teachers have not yielded promised results.

Resistance to Change

State Rep. Alisha Morgan (D-Atlanta) disagrees. She wants more attention to be devoted to public education reforms, including comprehensive teacher training, merit-based pay, and relevant curricular opportunities, before she would support a major school choice program such as universal vouchers.

"I would be more likely to support universal vouchers if I knew we were genuinely and comprehensively addressing the needs of traditional public education," Morgan said, "because I think universal vouchers by itself continues to ignore the vast majority of students who deserve a quality education."

Johnson has begun to draft a bill. At press time, the details of the initial proposal remained undetermined.

Kelly McCutchen, executive vice president of the Georgia Public Policy Foundation, a state-based research group, credited Johnson for his vigorous efforts to reach out to Democrats and minority leaders to build a coalition.

"That's the kind of effort it's going to take," McCutchen said.

Targeted Alternative

Johnson does not expect there to be enough support in the Republican caucus alone to move forward with such expansive school choice legislation.

"I feel like there's a growing interest in the African-American, Democratic caucus, which I think is ultimately critical to passing it," said Johnson.

But Morgan, who favors a proposal that would provide scholarship assistance to students in chronically failing schools, is not sold on the idea of universal vouchers.

"Middle- to upper-income families would most benefit," Morgan said. "I don't think that levels the playing field."

Polling Popularity

If the proposed bill passes, Georgia will become the first state with a universal voucher program.



Georgia state Sen. Eric Johnson plans to introduce a universal vouchers measure.

The idea, first touted by the late economist Milton Friedman in 1955, nearly came to fruition in Utah in 2007, but an organized opposition campaign overturned the law at the ballot box before universal vouchers could be implemented.

A Public Opinion Strategies survey of 600 Georgians released in July found 55 percent wanted vouchers to be "available to all students," while 40 percent thought they should be targeted at students in "chronically failing schools." Support for universal vouchers was strongest among Republicans and African-Americans.

Even though legislation to enact vouchers for students in failing Georgia public schools failed in 2008, survey respondents favored the proposal by 69 percent to 29 percent. "There is broad public support here for vouchers," Johnson said.

Johnson kicked off his campaign for universal vouchers with a speech commemorating Friedman at the Georgia Public Policy Foundation on July 31.

Growing Momentum

McCutchen noted recent growth in school choice opportunities for students through new legislation has changed the political terrain.

Georgia is in its second year of providing scholarships for special-needs students, and earlier this year the state adopted one of the nation's most expan-

sive tuition tax credit programs. Additionally, public school choice flourished with a 2006 law allowing districts to convert to flexible charter systems and establishing a new state-level charter school authorizer that bypasses stubborn local authorities.

"There are now children, teachers, and others who come to testify what school choice means to them," said McCutchen. "It's a whole new ballgame."

David Pusey, education policy specialist for the Center for an Educated Georgia, a school choice advocacy group based in Norcross, shares a similar perspective on the new programs' effects.

"As the word gets out there, people are getting excited," Pusey said. "They want to take advantage of this."

Embracing Choice

But Pusey observed it's difficult to gauge how much momentum is available for an even more aggressive school choice proposal. The special-needs scholarship program is just completing its first year, and the tax credit program is still awaiting rules for implementation.

"The programs will show their merit as they come along," Pusey said. "It's going to take a lot of time. But that consumer mentality is going, and it can only continue to grow."

Many Georgians already are embracing the power to make educational decisions, Morgan observed, and she says

many of her fellow Democrats would benefit by listening more to the families they represent than their fears of alleged agendas to destroy public education.



"I think if we were to spend more time as policymakers talking with parents, what we would understand is that parents want a choice."

ALISHA MORGAN
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
ATLANTA, GEORGIA

"I think if we were to spend more time as policymakers talking with parents, what we would understand is that parents want a choice," Morgan said.

Promoting Competition

Johnson said framing the issue of universal vouchers as a way to strengthen, rather than speak ill of, the traditional system already has gained some receptive audiences among business and community leaders.

"Instead of telling people how bad government schools are, I've been turning the message around and saying this will help our kids who remain in public schools," Johnson said.

Competition as a means to bring systemic improvement is a theme the Republican leader repeats to back his universal voucher proposal.

"If we are going to compete in a global environment, we need to stop thinking how Georgia ranks next to Alabama and South Carolina, and start thinking how it ranks next to Austria and South Korea," Johnson said.

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

INTERNET INFO

"New Poll: Georgians back vouchers," Georgia Political Digest.com, July 31, 2008: http://www.georgiapolitical-digest.com/article_21535.shtml

Colorado Group Sets Out to Construct Many New, Small, High-Quality Schools

By Jillian Melchior

Up to 100 new, autonomous schools may be started in Colorado over the next decade because of the efforts of

Get Smart Schools, a group launched this fall.

Colorado

The group pools the efforts of politicians, philanthropic organizations, and the education and business communities and has garnered the support of the Denver public school system. It capitalizes on the strong education reform efforts prevailing in the state, said Colorado State Senate President Peter Groff (D-Denver), who is a volunteer for and co-chairman of Get Smart Schools.

"[W]hy not build schools from the ground up that will seek to serve those [who are] under-served, whether they be poor students, middle-class students, gifted and talented students. We want to give these students access to a high-quality, high-performing school."

PETER GROFF
STATE SENATE PRESIDENT
DENVER, COLORADO

"The idea was, why not build schools from the ground up that will seek to serve those [who are] under-served, whether they be poor students, middle-class students, gifted and talented students," Groff said. "We want to give these students access to a high-quality, high-performing school."

'Very Ambitious Goal'

Get Smart Schools is working to create a leadership development program with Colorado universities. The schools will produce graduates qualified to open schools. Get Smart Schools will supply the money and support for them to carry it off, said Executive Director Amy Slothower.

By 2009, Slothower said, they hope three schools will open, and more will follow. Eventually, she said, Get Smart Schools hopes to account for at least 20



Colorado state Senate President Peter Groff is co-chairman of Get Smart Schools and one of a growing number of Democrats who support school choice.

percent of Colorado's K-12 students.

"It's a very ambitious goal," Slothower said. Though broken schools are difficult to fix, good ones can be created

from scratch, she explained.

Get Smart Schools will be purely privately funded. Slothower said schools cost about \$1 million apiece to create,

but the investment quickly pays off when 150 smart, well-taught students graduate each year fully prepared for college coursework, and when younger students complete their school year prepared to advance and succeed.

Paving the Way

Legislation passed in Colorado over the past several years has cleared the way for more of these autonomous schools to open. Get Smart Schools plans to take advantage of three different models of autonomous schools allowed in the state.

In addition to charter schools, the group can create pilot schools, which run like contract schools—they control their own budgets and curricula, and the staff creates their own work agreements. The organization can also build innovation schools, which during their formation can opt out of some of the work conditions of union contracts and from standard curricula.

Support from politicians such as Groff will be necessary to ensure no government barriers will hamper Get Smart Schools' growth.

"Once an urban Democrat who has received a great deal of support from the unions and the public school system speaks out, it gives other people the chance to do the same thing," Groff said.

"If there are statutory barriers to what some schools want to do or what Get Smart Schools wants to do," Groff continued, "my role as a legislator would be to create legislation to remove those barriers or lessen the restriction or irritation there may be to the growth of these schools."

Best Outlet

For Colorado children, Slothower said, this will translate to more and better opportunities. The program emphasizes diversity, and the organization will strive to ensure an average of 40 percent of each student body will be from low-income families.

"People have come to the point where the biggest question we have is, 'What's in the best educational interests of the child?'" Groff said. "I think we can figure out how to get there. People are looking for outlets where they can put their energy, their hopes, and dreams. They want an outlet like this."

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

In Other Words...

"The real business that they're in is collecting union dues. They are organized like a machine at the grassroots level. ... I am really just a parent who got kind of fed up one day."

— Simon Campbell, president of StopTeacherStrikes.org, based in Yardley, Pennsylvania, on why teacher unions are the main roadblock to education reform. Campbell would like Pennsylvania to become the 38th state that does not allow its teachers to strike. *The Evening Bulletin*, October 8, 2008

School Choice Gains Unlikely Advocates in Florida

By Aricka Flowers

Two new hires at the Florida School Choice Fund have made waves in the movement.

The Tampa-based organization seeks to advance public policy giving parents the power to choose the educational institution that best suits their child's needs. So it was a surprise when two formerly outspoken critics of school choice joined the fund's staff in August and September.

Doug Tuthill is the new president of the Florida School Choice Fund. At one point in his career he was a teachers union leader who reportedly told the *St. Petersburg Times* vouchers were "based on false assumptions and faulty logic." But Tuthill says he has been a supporter of school choice all along.

"I've been an advocate for school choice for 25 years, so it's really not a new thing for me," Tuthill said. "I started the first international baccalaureate program, which was one of the first choice programs in the 1980s. I have been advocating for school choice for quite some time—I just haven't supported it across the board.

"There have been some choice programs that I didn't support because they were not set up properly," Tuthill explained. "What you're seeing now is much more sophistication about accountability in these programs. I have always been in support of choice, just not programs that were poorly designed."

"There have been some choice programs that I didn't support because they were not set up properly. ... I have always been in support of choice, just not programs that were poorly designed."

**DOUG TUTHILL, PRESIDENT
FLORIDA SCHOOL CHOICE FUND**

Skeptical Public

Some members of the public have expressed concern about the new hires.

"Some people that I admire are skeptical of my motivations, but they should know better," said Jon East, the group's new communications director and former editorial writer for the *St. Petersburg Times* who joined the fund in September. "In some ways it's been a window on the narrowness of the public debate on this issue. There is very much a polarization

and idea that you have to be either for public schools or school choice, and there is no middle ground. But I am really for both.

"I'm into serving children and their parents, and giving them the opportunity to choose the school that is best for their needs. If people would turn down the temperature on the debate and stop the finger-pointing, they would see what we do serves kids very well, and we don't always have to be at odds," East continued.

Changed Opinion

As a journalist, East wrote numerous articles criticizing school choice. He says now the motivation for some of those stories was misinformation.

"I became a critic of school choice in 1999 and wrote articles that reflected that," East said. "I think the newspaper saw the choice movement as an attack on the institution of public schools.

"It may have been [that] in the beginning, but most of the people in the education community who strongly support public schools missed the point and have not allowed themselves to look at what these efforts are trying to do," East continued. "If you look closely at what we do here, helping low-income kids get better learning environments, you can't see it as anything but providing better opportunity for the students of Florida."

Jon Kirtley, chairman and founder of the Florida School Choice Fund, said the new hires show how school choice has evolved in the state.

"The hires of Doug and Jon are reflective of a changing environment for K-12 education in Florida," Kirtley said. "The overwhelming bipartisan vote in our 2008 [legislative] session expanding the tax credit scholarship is another example. People are becoming more concerned with children and outcomes, rather than systems and inputs."

Natural Evolution

East has been a journalist for more than two decades. As a highly respected reporter, he covered education issues and was seen as a staunch critic of school vouchers. His reputation as an effective communicator who was highly knowledgeable about the education system made him attractive to the Florida School Choice Fund when the position opened earlier this year.

"I was lured into taking this position by Doug Tuthill," East said. "And I realized that this is really a perfect match for me. Education advocacy is something I've been wanting to do for a long time.



"Having been a journalist my whole life, I've had to keep a distance between myself and the topics I cover, even when writing editorials," East continued. "And after some time, I felt that I could do more by working in the industry rather than just commenting on it as a journalist."

Easing Tensions

Tuthill said he and East, with their combined experience, will help ease the tension between teacher unions and school choice advocates, ultimately leading to better opportunities for Florida children.

"The transition has been great," said Tuthill. "Jon East and I were recently

in Tallahassee for a meeting with school boards and teachers associations, and the politics in Florida have changed pretty dramatically. There is large bipartisan support of the tax credit program, and there is a growing bipartisan movement in terms of school choice.

"The education establishment is looking to find common ground," Tuthill continued. "One of the reasons why Kirtley wanted us in these positions is because we can bring people together from both sides of the issue. It's been a great experience so far, and we have gotten positive feedback from all sides."

Aricka Flowers (atflowers2@gmail.com) writes from Chicago.

In Other Words...

"The need to improve educational stability for foster children is being recognized on Capitol Hill, too. Congress recently passed legislation requiring states to help ensure that when placed in a new home, foster children remain in the same school whenever possible.

"The body of research into how school disruption adversely affects children—and their educational performance—has grown greatly. As a result, social scientists are giving greater priority to finding ways to help foster children continue in familiar schools.

"Politicians and educators alike should recognize the unique challenges facing these at-risk children and support policies that can help give them a real chance to succeed.

"Education vouchers can do that, by fostering steady, vitally important school relationships—with teachers, classmates, and educational programs—in young lives yearning for stability."

— Stuart Butler, vice president for domestic policy issues, The Heritage Foundation, on the importance of vouchers for foster children. *The Washington Times*, October 2, 2008

New DC Schools Chancellor Presses Strong Reform Agenda

Michelle Rhee has declared war on the old guard in Washington's schools

By Matthew Bishop

Turning around America's public schools is one of the litany of promises every ambitious politician makes en route to Washington, DC. But on Capitol Hill itself, the woman charged with turning around the worst urban schools in America carries herself less like a politician than a pugilist.

After just one year in the newly created office of "chancellor" of District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), Michelle Rhee has fired and replaced almost 50 principals—including the one at her own child's school—along with dismissing 93 members of the central office staff.

Of the 144 schools she took command of last year, 21 are already history. That number is expected to grow.

Multiple Protests

Needless to say, Rhee's reign of terror has left many former employees gnashing their teeth. At 37, Rhee, a Korean-American, has been accused of racism, sexism, and ageism by the principals union. Other protests complained the terminations, which took the form of letters stating the recipients' contracts would not be renewed, didn't even offer explanations.

Rhee's response to this criticism was summary: "Both principals and assistant principals serve at the will of the chancellor."

Speaking to the media in September at a luncheon in Washington, DC, Rhee opened with a humorous promise to disregard her advisors.

"Today I have several staff members with me, because they're absolutely terrified that I'll come to the National Press Club and actually do what I normally do, which is speak my mind about things," Rhee said.

No Quarter

Rhee then went on to detail why what she called "the four Cs"—cooperation, collaboration, consensus-building, and compromise—are overrated. An example is her unwillingness to compromise with the Washington Teachers Union (WTU).

"When you are talking about a contract or a collective-bargaining agreement that has provisions in it that I do not believe are in the best interests of children, then I refuse to sign my name," Rhee said. "This is me being absolutely unwilling to

compromise when it comes to the rights and futures of our kids."

Performance-Based Pay

At the center of her struggle with WTU is a groundbreaking effort to change how Washington pays its teachers. Favoring a performance-based compensation package of salary and bonuses over the existing one, Rhee has devised a two-tiered plan under which teachers could opt to earn up to \$131,000 annually—in many cases more than twice as much as they currently earn. First, though, they would be required to relinquish tenure and prove themselves during a one-year probationary period. Rhee has dubbed this option the "green tier."

Alternatively, current teachers could choose the more traditional "red tier," which wouldn't offer the same increases in compensation but would include current tenure protections. New hires would not have this option, so eventually tenure protections would be phased out. Irrespective of their chosen tier, the chancellor says, all DCPS teachers would receive a minimum raise of 28 percent.

If implemented, the new contract would be the first of its kind nationwide, and Rhee already has made clear her willingness to bypass WTU to get what she wants. At stake are two of the primary mechanisms by which she believes DCPS's abysmal performance can be reversed—empowering principals to fire ineffective teachers and attracting better teachers by increasing compensation.

"The bottom line is we are going to bring accountability in a very significant way to the educator force in this school district."

MICHELLE RHEE, CHANCELLOR
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOL

Rhee's union-proof ace in the hole, officially named "Plan B," will use a seldom-enforced provision already on the books to place underperforming teachers under a 90-day performance review. DCPS principals have been asked to prepare and submit lists of their underperforming teachers immediately.

Creative Solutions

Another weapon could soon be added to the chancellor's arsenal. The DC superintendent of education, Deborah Gist,



Michelle Rhee

has suggested changing how DC teachers are licensed. Her proposal would make current licenses nonrenewable and require a probationary period in order to earn the new license.

Backed by Gist and DC Mayor Adrian Fenty, Rhee has made no secret of her leverage in contractual negotiations with WTU.

"The contract is the way that I would prefer to go," Rhee said. "But if we can't get to agreement on the contract, there's another very clear way that we can get there. The bottom line is we are going to bring accountability in a very significant way to the educator force in this school district."

Accountability will not solve everything, Rhee says, so she is encouraging an array of outside-the-box solutions for students coming from dysfunctional homes and destitute neighborhoods.

After-School Programs

Among them, the new Capital Gains program pays students for attendance, good grades, and proper behavior. Another program, initiated last year at Raymond Elementary School, where performance in critical skills was suffering, utilizes every member of the school staff—teachers, administrators, counselors, and custodians—in order to tutor students after hours. In the past year, math and reading scores jumped 32 percent and 27 percent, respectively.

"I love the after-school programs," said Danielle Holloman, a grateful mother of a Raymond student. "Thanks to all the staff

for all they do. They go beyond the call of duty."

Nonetheless, the problems ahead cannot be shrugged off. Three years ago, the U.S. Department of Education placed DCPS on its list of schools and districts at "high risk" of losing Title I federal funding based on "numerous accountability issues." It now stands alone among all the school systems in the nation on that list.

Rhee, who in July axed 750 under-qualified teachers and paraprofessionals, managed to bring DCPS into compliance with the No Child Left Behind Act this year—an important step toward meeting federal accountability mandates.

Forging Ahead

Facing federal threats, at loggerheads with the unions, sued by angry ex-employees, and overseeing a decrepit and crumbling educational empire, the chancellor remains emphatically determined.

"There is no doubt in my mind," Rhee said during her September press luncheon. "I'm extraordinarily confident that we have everything it will take to turn this into the highest-performing urban school district in the country."

Two things are certain: Rhee is not the type to make idle threats or empty promises, and until DC's schools begin to shape up, the heads will keep rolling.

Matthew Bishop (bishopm@spectator.org) is the National Journalism Center Fellow at The American Spectator in Washington, DC.

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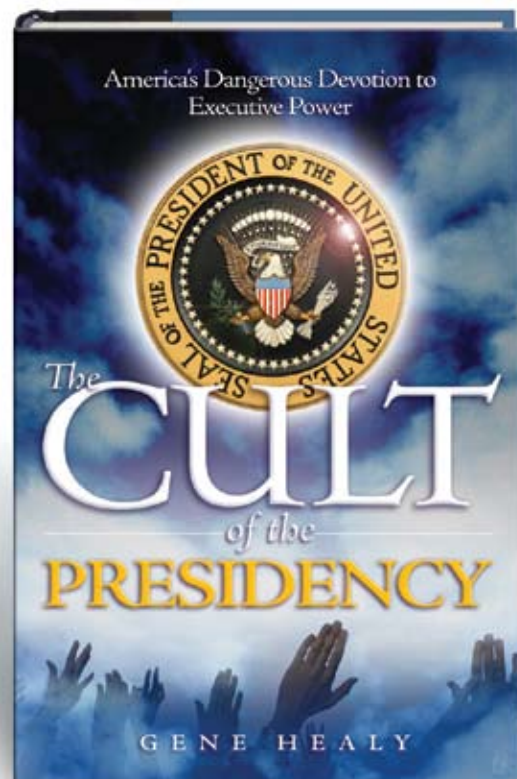
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Michigan's On-Time Graduation Rate Is Shockingly Low: Report

By Elisha Maldonado

A yearly report conducted by Michigan's Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI) has come up with startling new statistics



concerning the state's high school students.

The data, compiled using a new formula, say one-fourth of Michigan's high school students are

not graduating in four years.

CEPI spokesperson Leslee Fritz said the state used to consider a student a graduate if he or she started senior year and earned a diploma at the end of it. The new methodology, called four-year cohort graduation rates, tracks students from ninth through 12th grade.

This “accounts for students who transfer in and out of the district, who leave school permanently, who leave school during one school year and return in another, and for students who are retained in a grade but stay in school and graduate later than their original classmates,” according to the state.

“[Ultimately], our goal as a state is [for students] to graduate and get a diploma. Whatever the cause may be, we don't want to give up on a kid.”

LESLEE FRITZ

CENTER FOR EDUCATIONAL PERFORMANCE AND INFORMATION

Slow Implementation

Since this is the first set of four-year data, Fritz explained, the reported 25 percent of students not finishing in four years is high. That is because statisticians haven't yet incorporated the students who have been held back but might still graduate with a diploma.

The new methodology, Fritz said, “is being adopted nationally and meets the requirements of No Child Left Behind.”

Fritz continued, “All 50 governors have signed on, and every state is implementing it. Since we have to track from the first year in high school through, it can't happen overnight. The spotlight is on four years. [Ultimately],

our goal as a state is [for students] to graduate and get a diploma. Whatever the cause may be, we don't want to give up on a kid.”



“Certainly parents, students, and taxpayers would like to know if most

of the students at their local high school graduate within four years, and if not, why not?”

LORIE SHANE, MANAGING EDITOR

MICHIGAN EDUCATION REPORT

MACKINAC CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY

Equal Comparisons

But the new measuring system could cause problems, experts say.

Lorie Shane, managing editor of the Mackinac Center for Public Policy's *Michigan Education Report*, said, “Critics say this new calculation creates an incentive to push students through the system in four years, even if they genuinely need more time.”

The value of the new formula, Shane said, is that it allows high schools and school districts to compare graduation and dropout rates methodically.

“Do [schools and districts] deliver a solid education to the majority of students in a reasonable amount of time at reasonable expense?” Shane asked. “Certainly parents, students, and taxpayers would like to know if most of the students at their local high school graduate within four years, and if not, why not?”

Still, students don't fail on their own, Shane notes. She points out there are two ways the low graduation rates can be rectified.

“Teacher quality is a major factor in student achievement, so programs that strengthen teacher quality will ultimately help students,” Shane said.

And, Shane continued, “School choice would allow parents to choose the best setting for their child. The added competition also would likely push conventional public schools to improve.”

Elisha Maldonado (elishamaldonado@gmail.com) writes from California.

Effort to Cut Illinois Dropout Rate Is Unveiled

By Aricka Flowers

The official Illinois Task Force on Reenrolling Students Who Dropped out of School has released a report offering several recommendations to get high school dropouts back in school.

The September 2008 report calls for the creation of a new statewide initiative called the Reenrolled Student Program, which is expected to reenroll some 24,800 students annually by 2013.

"The program would consist of small class and school sizes that would provide students the personalized help they need," explained Jack Wuest, executive director of the Alternative School Network, a Chicago nonprofit that helped spearhead the reenrollment effort and provides educational opportunities to inner-city children, youth, and adults.

"The program would also help students deal with the family issues that caused them to drop out in the first place," Wuest continued. "Students can form relationships with staff and teachers who understand the types of issues affecting and preventing them from staying in school."

"Mayor [Richard] Daley and Chicago Public Schools CEO Arne Duncan have been pushing for smaller schools and recognize that they do make a difference," Wuest said. "The key to education is to get and keep students engaged, and to address the problems that may make them drop out in the first place."

Multiple Recommendations

The report also suggests the schools be equipped with strong, experienced principals and staff, ongoing professional development for teachers, technological learning centers, mentors for students, and curricula that stress academic and career development.

Other recommendations include the development of performance standards for programs that serve reenrolled students, not counting against a school district's dropout numbers if a reenrolled student drops out of the program, and an annual report on the condition of reenrolled students who graduate from the program.

According to the report, as of 2006 more than 100,000 Illinois students between the ages of 17 and 20 had dropped out of school. Among those between the ages of 21 and 24, 138,000 had dropped out. With about 24,000 students dropping out each academic year, education experts say a plan is needed to tackle the problem.

"There is a need for a forum to address the gap facing students who have dropped out of school," said Veronica Anderson, editor-in-chief of *Catalyst Chicago*, an education magazine in the city. "These students don't have jobs or options to become productive citizens or to learn and do better. The task force is providing a plan to give these students opportunity. There just aren't enough options for students in the age range of dropouts."

High Costs

The report highlights the social cost of failing to address the needs of dropouts. It notes the unemployment rate for Illinois dropouts is 47 percent and they are 3.5 times more likely to be arrested in their lifetime than high school graduates. In addition, 70 percent of men in prison are dropouts.

School officials say addressing the problem will save Illinois taxpayers money in the long run.

"The research shows that the dropout phenomenon is a problem that affects all of the state, not just Chi-



Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich (left) and Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley (right) have been presented with a task force report with recommendations for reducing the state's high school dropout rate. They are shown here with president-elect Sen. Barack Obama (D-IL).

cago," said Matt Vanover, spokesman for the Illinois Board of Education. "When you look at the lost earnings that a dropout encounters, and the cost to society as well as the drain on resources and loss in taxes, it's certainly a problem that needs to be looked at further and addressed."

"[A]s of 2006 more than 100,000 Illinois students between the ages of 17 and 20 had dropped out of school."

Illinois taxpayers could see a cumulative cost reduction of more than \$183 million by the end of 2013 thanks to the Reenrolled Students Program, the task force estimates. Reenrolling 8,000 students a year would save taxpayers \$37 million over that time frame; if 11,000 students were reenrolled in a year, \$51 million would be saved.

Funding Concerns

The report has been sent to Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich (D) and the Illinois General Assembly for review.

The biggest obstacle to the program's implementation is funding. In an extremely tight economy, the report recommends \$32 million for the program's first year. However, the task force contends, currently for

every \$100 spent on enrolled high school students, just 59 cents is spent on comprehensive opportunities for students who have dropped out.

"It's going to come down to putting money up for the program," Wuest said. "Hopefully the state and federal government can put up the funds that are needed to get the program started. We must have some political will from the governor's office and the state board of education to get the funds needed to get these kids reenrolled in programs that will work for them."

"Budgets are tight, but there are way too many kids on the streets with nothing to do, and it's directly linked to all of the violence that is plaguing our students," Wuest continued. "Eight Chicago Public School students have already been killed, and the school year has just started."

Aricka Flowers (atflowers2@gmail.com) writes from Chicago.

INTERNET INFO

"Illinois Task Force on Reenrolling Students Who Dropped Out of School: Final Report," September 2008: <http://www.asnchicago.org/PDFs/2008/ReenrolledStudentsFinalReportSept2008.pdf>

Pittsburgh's New Grading Policy Deemed Deceptive, Bad for Students



Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers President John Tarka defends the city's grading policy.

By Ben DeGrow

A leading Pennsylvania free-market research organization says a newly enforced school grading policy in the state's second-largest city is poorly conceived and marks a further step away from meaningful reform.

On September 16, Pittsburgh Public Schools issued a memorandum calling for the enforcement of a little-used district-wide grading policy that has been on the books since 1994. The policy says students will receive no less than 50 percent credit on assigned tests and homework, regardless of effort or proficiency.

That means a zero score will automatically be replaced with half-credit. School district standards register any score below 60 percent as an E, or failing grade.

Nathan Benefield, director of policy research at the Harrisburg-based Commonwealth Foundation, believes Pittsburgh's grading policy sets a poor standard.

"That's really a perverse incentive," Benefield said. "Rather than pushing students to do better, it gives them the incentive to do nothing and still get 50 percent. If I knew I could [never] get [less than] 50 percent, why would I ever study?"

Staying on Track

John Tarka, president of the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers, says teachers and administrators could address that issue separately.

"If a child thinks they're going to just get a 50 without doing anything, that becomes a behavior issue," Tarka said.

Instead, Tarka says the 50 percent floor is needed to prevent students who get off to a difficult start in the school year from falling behind to the point of inevitable failure.

"We want to make sure that children do achieve, but we also want to make sure that children aren't put in a position from which they can't extricate themselves," Tarka said.

Raising Questions

Benefield disagrees, saying the grading policy doesn't benefit students in the long run.

"They're not doing the kids any favors, really," Benefield said. "Just lowering standards to pass kids along is not really helping anyone."

Tarka says teacher opinion is mixed on the policy's 50 percent floor, and it has been especially unwelcome among high school instructors who are used to

giving out zeroes as a way to indicate to parents when students aren't doing their assigned work.

"We still have some wrinkles to iron out in this policy," Tarka said.

Obscuring Performance

But Benefield shares the basis of these teachers' concerns, noting the grading policy could hamper parents' ability to get a true sense of their children's school progress.

"It may be indicative that if a student can't get 50 percent on these tests, then they will need remediation," Benefield said. "It doesn't really tell parents how far behind their children are."

According to the local *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review* newspaper, many parents also expressed their disapproval with the grading policy.

Wrong Direction

Benefield says the revised grading policy provides further evidence Pittsburgh Public Schools is headed in the wrong direction. A Commonwealth Foundation analysis released in August revealed only 20 percent of the district's eighth-graders are proficient by the standards of national reading tests, while the statewide average is 36 percent.

Meanwhile, data from the Pennsylvania Department of Education indicate Pittsburgh spent nearly \$20,000 per student in the 2006-07 school year.

To put district budget dollars to more effective use, Benefield suggests raising standards is only the beginning of the solution.

"They also need school choice in Pittsburgh badly," Benefield said, noting the state's tuition tax credit program is too limited to address the needs of enough of the city's students.

Ben DeGrow (ben@i2i.org) is a policy analyst for the Independence Institute, a think tank in Golden, Colorado.

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 us at 312/377-4000, email think@heartland.org.

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INTERNET INFO

A Pennsylvania School Report Card: How the Commonwealth's Public Schools Stack Up to the Rest of the Nation, by David V. Anderson, Commonwealth Foundation, August 2008: <http://www.commonwealthfoundation.org/policy-briefs/pennsylvania-school-report-card-how-commonwealth-s-public-schools-stack-rest-nation>

Purpose of AFT 'Reform' Fund Questioned

By Neal McCluskey

The American Federation of Teachers, the nation's second-largest teachers union, has announced the creation of a new fund to "support sustainable, innovative, and collaborative reform projects ... to strengthen our public schools."

Critics say the new AFT Innovation Fund is a public relations ploy and the union still strongly opposes real reform.

Few specifics about the fund were available at press time. Union officials had reported they expected to spend four to six months planning the program and to have no projects operating before 2009. They said the fund will start with \$1 million in union cash, and they will seek additional funds from philanthropic sources.

The September announcement followed closely on the heels of the Democratic National Convention, which took place in August, during which teacher unions came in for some unexpected criticism as enemies of reform.

The Innovation Fund will work to strike a balance between advancing programs with a proven track record and taking risks on approaches that are long on common sense but which currently may be short on evidence."

**RANDI WEINGARTEN, PRESIDENT
AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS**

Existing Model

In a column published in the October issue of the union's newspaper, *American Teacher*, AFT President Randi Weingarten elaborated on the topic.

"The Innovation Fund will work to strike a balance between advancing programs with a proven track record and taking risks on approaches that are long on common sense but which currently may be short on evidence," Weingarten wrote.

"In fact," Weingarten continued, "I expect the Innovation Fund to support good ideas that no one else has ever tried, ideas we have reason to believe will be successful, but which have yet to receive a seal of approval from the so-called education establishment."

To illustrate past AFT support for inno-

vative reforms, union officials pointed to AFT-backed initiatives such as Toledo, Ohio's teacher mentoring and evaluation program; a differentiated teacher pay plan in Douglas County, Colorado; and union-sponsored charter schools.

"The AFT has a long-standing history of reform," Weingarten said in the union's announcement about the fund. "With the Innovation Fund, the AFT will be able to support and expand these types of reforms in a systemic way."

Skeptical Reaction

Despite the reform language surrounding the fund's launch, some union and education watchdogs expressed doubts about AFT's reform record and the true motives behind the fund.

"The Toledo peer review program has been around longer than the first charter school. If it's such an innovation, why hasn't it swept the country?" asked Mike Antonucci, director of the teachers-union monitoring Education Intelligence Agency, based in California. "If 'union-partnered' charter schools are so great, why do teacher unions all across the nation demand caps on the number of charter schools? If differentiated pay is lauded in Douglas County, why is it fought everywhere else?"

Antonucci said he suspects AFT's creation of the fund is driven more by public relations concerns than a desire to explore really innovative reforms.

"The union's biggest weakness is its terrible public image," Antonucci said. Teacher unions are "seen as the primary obstacle to education reform—regardless of what form that education reform takes. The purpose of the AFT Innovation Fund is to have something to point to whenever this sore topic is raised."

Hopeful Interpretation

Joe Williams, executive director of the New York City-based Democrats for Education Reform, which hosted a panel discussion at the Democratic National Convention during which teacher unions were painted as reform obstructionists, said creating the fund probably is a public relations move. That is not, however, necessarily incompatible with sincere reform efforts, he said.

"I think that [the AFT is] frustrated that they've been labeled as anti-reform," Williams said. "I think it's definitely public relations, but that doesn't mean that they aren't open to reform. The best defense is a good offense."

Neal McCluskey (nmccluskey@cato.org) is associate director of the Cato Institute's Center for Educational Freedom in Washington, DC.



REUTERS/Mitch Dumke (UNITED STATES)

Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, says the group's new Innovation Fund will "support good ideas that no one else has ever tried." Critics say the fund is little more than a public relations ploy.

Announcing Two New Books

By
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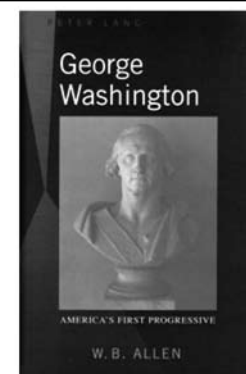
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Remedial College Education Now Reaching Record Levels

By Elisha Maldonado

For many college freshmen, school has just gotten a lot tougher.

That's because one-third of them will be taking remedial courses to learn subjects they should have mastered in high school, according to a study by Strong American Schools, an education advocacy group based in Washington, DC. And colleges teaching subjects after high schools failed to do so means additional costs to students, their families, and taxpayers in general.

Remedial education at public universities costs taxpayers an estimated \$2.5 billion per year, in addition to the tuition and fees paid by the students, said Adam Thivault, policy director of Strong American Schools.

Unprepared Students

The report, titled "Diploma to Nowhere" and released September 22, largely places the blame on American educational institutions, saying high schools "profoundly

fail to prepare students for post-secondary work."

Thivault agrees.

"We are not creating high enough standards and are not aligning them in college readiness standards," Thivault said. "It is a problem in middle and high schools. They are not challenging [students] to get prepared."

The lack of student preparation is spread among students of all races and income levels. Unpreparedness can affect even pupils who think they've done everything right—to their own surprise and embarrassment, Thivault said.

When Strong American Schools began its investigation a year ago, the group made it a point, Thivault said, to interview students who had been remediated.

"Almost four out of five that we surveyed had a 3.0 or higher grade-point average, and most of them expressed a negative emotion when asked [how they



Neal McCluskey

felt about being in remedial courses]," Thivault said.

Alternative Routes

According to the study, the majority of students said they had taken a rigorous course load in high school. Some even had taken advanced courses said to be similar to college courses.

Even so, the majority of the students said their high school courses were too easy, according to the report.

Part of the reason so many students wind up in remedial college courses, said Neal McCluskey, an education policy analyst at the Cato Institute in Washington DC, is that not all of them actually belong in college. Some would be served better by going to vocational school or spending a few years in the workforce before moving on to higher education.

"One of the biggest problems is that we as a society, especially political leaders,

say that everyone essentially needs to go to college—that the American dream runs through ivy-covered buildings," McCluskey explained. "No political leader, or most, won't say, 'Well, lots of kids don't have the wherewithal to go to college.' People don't want to think leaders are condemning their kids to a second-class existence."

Parental Choice

McCluskey offered what he said is an easy solution: Put public education choices in the hands of the parents, "not in the single system of public schools."

Public schools, McCluskey explained, are required to treat all kids the same because they are in the same system. School choice exists to enable parents to choose schools based on their child's aptitude for learning.

Elisha Maldonado (elishamaldonado@gmail.com) writes from California.

INTERNET INFO

"Diploma to Nowhere," Strong American Schools, September 22, 2008: http://www.edin08.com/uploaded-Files/Issues/Issues_Pages/Diploma-ToNowhere.pdf

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

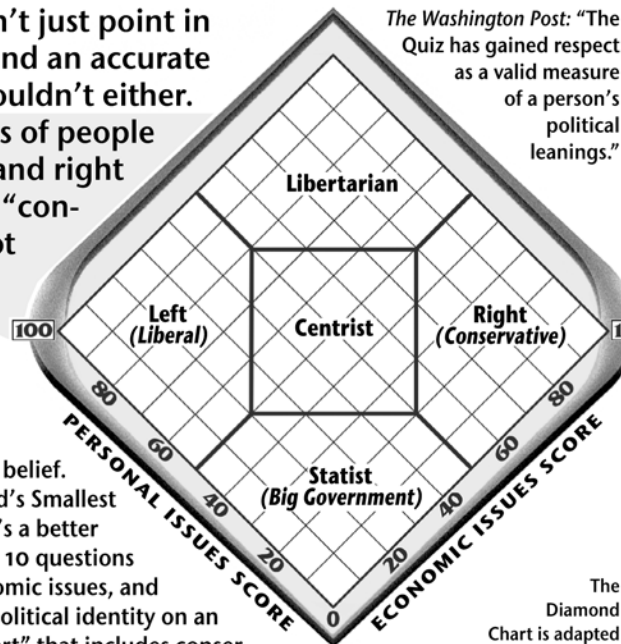
A compass doesn't just point in two directions — and an accurate map of politics shouldn't either. The fact is, millions of people say the labels left and right — or "liberal" and "conservative" — do not properly describe their politics.

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

School Choice Scoreboard 2008: The Year in Review

By Dan Proft

As we close the book on 2008, a review of the strides made to advance the cause of quality education for all children in the United States has infused me with the spirit of a college pep squad leader playfully taunting the opposing fans while cheering the home team on to victory.

There is still a long way to go, particularly in our decaying urban school systems, before we truly fulfill our moral obligation and national security imperative to give all children a chance to earn a quality education that prepares them to compete effectively in our digital, global economy.

But it is school reformers, both Republicans and Democrats, who defined the terms of education debate in 2008.

Trend Toward Choice

Innovative legislative leaders and forward-thinking governors are standing up to the teacher unions and finally making them attempt to defend the indefensible performance of failing school systems or propose their own reforms.

Results vary from state to state, but thanks in part to the success of real choice programs, the trend line is clearly moving against the tired rhetoric and machine tactics of the teacher unions.

But, hey, don't take my word for it. Just take a look at the national "scoreboard."

• Study: Milwaukee Voucher Students Have Diploma Edge

"Students who participate in Milwaukee's private-school-voucher program graduate from high school at significantly higher rates than those who attend regular secondary schools in the city, a new study contends." *Education Week*, January 28, 2008

• On School Choice, New York Gov is No Knee-Jerk Liberal

"But at least on one issue, [New York Gov.] Paterson breaks from liberal orthodoxy. He is passionately in favor of school choice. ..." *The Wall Street Journal*, March 13, 2008

• School Choice Competition Working in Florida, New Report Shows

"America's largest school voucher program for students with special needs, the John M. McKay Scholarship for Students with Disabilities, has led to increased achievement among public school students with special needs, a new report by the New York-based Manhattan Institute reveals. ... The McKay Pro-



New York Gov. David Paterson (center) is "passionate" about school choice.

gram was established in 1999 and is benefiting 19,439 students this school year." *Reuters*, May 2, 2008

• Tuition Tax Credit Program Signed Into Law in Georgia

"A universal tuition tax credit program was signed into law in Georgia, granting parents access to \$50 million in scholarships to send their children to private schools. ..." *Education Report*, www.educationreport.org, May 19, 2008

• Louisiana Senate Passes Small School Choice Plan

"In a major legislative success for Gov. Bobby Jindal, the Louisiana Senate voted 25 to 12 ... for a bill that would let up to 1,500 low- to middle-income students in New Orleans attend private schools at taxpayer expense." *The Associated Press*, June 12, 2008

• Study: Vouchers Improve Education

"Ohio's private-school voucher program isn't just great for the students who use it, a new study asserts, but it's actually made public schools better. It was the first sizable study of the statewide voucher program, now in its third year." *Columbus Dispatch*, August 21, 2008

• Democrats Get the Idea

"At an August 24 event organized by Democrats for Education Reform, a New York City-based political action committee, urban mayors and civil rights activists argued for teacher pay-for-performance and the expansion of charter schools.

"Mayor Cory Booker of Newark, N.J., said at a press conference before the three-hour seminar that the debate over those issues is a 'battle at the heart of the Democratic Party. ... As Democrats, we have been wrong on education. It's time

to get it right." *Education Week*, August 29, 2008

• California Governor Signs Legislation Strengthening Charter School Finances

SB 658, authored by Senate Majority Leader Gloria Romero (D-Los Angeles), which was supported by the California Charter Schools Association and many other educational groups, designates \$100 million over the next five years for charter schools. *Reuters*, September 25, 2008

• Former Critics Join Voucher Group

The new head of the leading voucher group in Florida is a former teachers

"My hope for 2009 is that we will increase both the speed and trajectory of a reform journey that will define our nation's destiny in the twenty-first century."

union leader who once said vouchers were "based on false assumptions and faulty logic." His hiring may be another sign that the bitter political lines over vouchers are not as hard and fast as they were just a few years ago. *St. Petersburg Times*, September 12, 2008

Partisanship Receding

In 2008, education reform led state governments to embrace their role as laboratories of democracy in the Madisonian tradition. Partisan politics have been swept aside by the refusal of broad cross-sections of opinion leaders to stand by and watch another generation of young people be relegated to second-class-citizen status because they lack the skills to compete.

My hope for 2009 is that we will increase both the speed and trajectory of a reform journey that will define our nation's destiny in the twenty-first century.

Dan Proft, J.D. (dan@urqmedia.com) is a principal of Urquhart Media LLC, a Chicago-based public affairs firm, and political commentator for the *Don Wade & Roma Morning Show* on WLS-AM 890.

Did You Know?

Florida's education reforms, which include several school choice programs, have revolutionized test scores statewide.

According to a policy report released September 30 by the Phoenix, Arizona-based Goldwater Institute, Florida fourth-graders' reading scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) declined between 1992 and 1998. By 1999, nearly half of them scored "below basic" on the NAEP.

But by 2007—less than 10 years after the reforms were launched—the state is leading in several areas:

- Of all Hispanic students nationwide, those in Florida had the second-highest reading scores. Florida's African-American students had the fourth-highest scores of all African-American students nationwide.
- The average Florida Hispanic student's score is higher than the overall average score for all students in Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Hawaii, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nevada, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee, and West Virginia.

— "Demography Defeated: Florida's K-12 Reforms and Their Lessons for the Nation," by Dan Lips and Matthew Ladner, Goldwater Institute, September 30, 2008

Connecticut Hit by Wave of Sweeping Reform Proposals

By Lewis M. Andrews

Connecticut is in the midst of a wave of unusually sweeping reform plans constituting a grassroots rebellion against waste and corruption in the state's education systems.

This May, the first selectman (mayor) of Chester presented local officials with a startling plan to reform education in the district: Pay students not to attend public school.

Tom Marsh wants to give \$1,500 a year to families who send a child to vocational school and \$3,000 to families who homeschool, and to put \$5,000 in a college scholarship fund for anyone transferring to a private high school. Marsh also wants to give a full two-year community college scholarship worth \$5,000 to students who graduate from public high school in three years.

Because the per-pupil cost at Chester's regional high school is nearly \$14,000, Marsh believes all these choices would improve the quality of education while reducing property taxes.



the municipal budget. The goal is to provide residents with a lower-cost alternative to local public schools when they are asked to approve the next budget in spring 2009.

Costs Have Doubled

Connecticut may once have had the reputation for being exceptionally generous in its education spending, but in recent years, disenchantment with the price of government, especially as it relates to public schooling, has been growing.

The reasons are obvious. Over the past 25 years, Connecticut's student population has increased only 10 percent, yet the inflation-adjusted cost of schooling more than doubled—to \$8.8 billion in 2006, up from \$3.4 billion in 1981.

Seventeen years ago, when the state enacted an income tax, politicians promised real estate and other taxes would fall. Instead, they soared.

Almost all the increased income went to the public sector, via an education cost-sharing formula that uses income from residents in the suburbs to subsidize urban schools. Teacher salaries and benefits climbed in every school district, thanks to binding arbitration laws skewed to give public employees an advantage in collective bargaining negotiations.

Cadillac Spending

Now the average teacher salary in Connecticut is the highest nationwide—\$57,750 per year, excluding benefits. At the same time, the nonpartisan taxpayer watchdog group the Tax Foundation awards Connecticut the dubious honors of having both the heaviest property tax burden and the largest

total tax burden per household of any state.

According to a calculator on the NABR Web site, even the smallest municipalities unnecessarily have spent millions on school construction, much of it to meet predicted population booms that never materialized.

The calculator (www.betterredding.org) enables a resident of any town nationwide to compare the cost of constructing and staffing a new building (or addition) to the cost of simply subsidizing the overflow number of students to attend private, parochial, or homeschools.

"You could extend the subsidy to children already in such schools and still save hundreds of millions long term," says NABR President David Bohn.

Mediocre Results

Today, Connecticut taxpayers find themselves caught between plunging real estate values in the wake of the subprime mortgage crisis and steadily increasing property taxes, and getting little for it. The National Assessment of Educational Progress puts eighth-grade proficiency figures in the state at 53 percent for writing, 37 percent for reading, 35 percent for math, and 33 percent for science.

Connecticut's constitution does not permit voter-initiated statewide referenda. But most towns in Connecticut fold school budgets into the municipal budgets, which can be voted on at town meetings, by annual referendum, or by a petition-inspired referendum. Last spring, citizens across the state registered their displeasure with the high cost of mediocre schools.

The affluent towns of Farmington, Stonington, and Ridgefield, for example, all rejected proposed spending plans from their politicians and school boards. In June, the voters of suburban West Hartford, where schools have traditionally ranked among the best in the state, defeated the budget by an astonishing 7,037 to 3,711 votes. A record 85 of Connecticut's 169 municipalities had budget referenda; the median approved spending increase was 3.8 percent, down from 5 percent last year and 5.3 percent in 2006.

Subpar Accounting

Mike Guarco, chairman of the Granby finance board, has formed the Connecticut Municipal Consortium for Fiscal Responsibility, a bipartisan alliance of elected officials representing 117 towns statewide. The group fights against binding arbitration, "prevailing wage" laws for public building projects, and burdensome state mandates such as a requirement that all student suspensions be supervised in-house. These are the three largest cost-drivers of K-12 education.

With this gathering grassroots rebellion—and with the archbishop in Hartford advocating a tax credit for corporations that help poor students attend private schools—the state's public education establishment is growing increasingly nervous. Last December the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education and the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents wrote an unprecedented joint letter to every school board and superintendent statewide criticizing Dr. Armand Fusco, a retired school superintendent who advises citizen cost-cutting committees statewide.

Fusco has not backed down. Instead, he campaigns across the state to highlight most school boards' lax accounting procedures: Computers and other equipment are not marked and tracked; superintendents' credit cards are not audited; part-time public school employees can receive full-time benefits; and almost no school board has written policies to prevent waste and corruption.

Fusco believes Connecticut school districts could be losing hundreds of thousands of dollars in unaudited student activity funds annually.

"Sadly, the number of school board members who can stand on principle ... without the prodding of independent taxpayer groups seems to be small," Fusco laments in his manual on *Ending Corruption and Waste in Your Public School*.

Lewis Andrews (lew@yankeeinstitute.org) is executive director of the Yankee Institute for Public Policy, a nonpartisan free-market research group based in Hartford, Connecticut.

"Sadly, the number of school board members who can stand on principle ... without the prodding of independent taxpayer groups seems to be small."

DR. ARMAND FUSCO
RETIRED SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENT
ENDING CORRUPTION AND WASTE IN YOUR PUBLIC SCHOOL

Citizen Uprising

Marsh is not alone in his efforts. On June 30 the Enfield board of education held a special session to review the findings of a citizen cost-cutting committee. The 17-member committee's suggestions included replacing some public school teachers with low-cost college interns, restricting the use of school vehicles, and increasing employee contributions to benefit plans.

In Redding, the taxpayer group Nonpartisan Action for a Better Redding (NABR) is preparing to send a postcard to every one of that community's 4,000 homes, inviting citizens to join a group that will review school expenses with an eye toward trimming 10 percent from

Environmentalist Zealots Indoctrinate Students at Taxpayer Expense

By Robert Holland

A coalition of environmental advocacy groups is pushing for the implementation of a federally financed environmentalist agenda in the curricula of all public schools.

The benign-sounding No Child Left Inside Act, HB 3036, won U.S. House of Representatives approval on a 294-109 vote September 19, with only one Democrat (Rep. Brad Ellsworth of Indiana) opposed and two ranking Republicans on the Education Committee (Reps. Howard McKeon of California and Michael Castle of Delaware) in support.

Congress went into fall recess before the Senate acted on the measure, but the bill could be integrated with the No Child Left Behind reauthorization next year or attached to a spending bill in the post-election lame-duck session.

Two dozen environmental groups, led by the Sierra Club and Chesapeake Bay Foundation, are lobbying for the measure, which would award grants for integrating environmentalist precepts into curricula, academic standards, and teacher preparation.

The money could go not just to school districts but to the very nonprofit advocacy organizations working to pass the bill.

"The [nature-deficit disorder] theory is an intriguing (if unproven) one, but should Washington take over from parents, churches, and community groups the task of taking kids out on hikes to commune with nature?"

Objectivity Voted Down

By a 230-172 vote, the House rejected an amendment proposed by Rep. Tom Price (R-GA) that would have barred lobbying groups from receiving the grants and would have sought scientific accuracy and balance in what students were taught about the environment through the funded programs.

The coalition's Web site, hosted by the Chesapeake Bay group, indicates the slant it would seek in classrooms by defining "the problem" as, among other things, climate change, childhood obesity, and something called "nature-deficit disorder."



Rep. Brad Ellsworth



Rep. Howard McKeon



Rep. Michael Castle

That is a term author Richard Louv coined in his book *Last Child in the Woods*, where he argued children are losing touch with the natural world and hence becoming vulnerable to maladies such as attention deficit disorder, depression, and obesity.

The theory is an intriguing (if unproven) one, but should Washington take over from parents, churches, and community groups the task of taking kids out on hikes to commune with nature?

Humans Blamed

As for climate change, the coalition asserts, "the issue of global climate change requires Americans to understand the human-created challenges facing our world and the options facing our nation moving forward. It is projected that major societal change will be needed in response to global warming. To that end, each of us may be called upon to make changes to reduce the impact on the environment."

That statement assumes global warming is occurring as a result of the activities of man, and that drastic, mandatory changes in modern living will be necessary to curb it. Clearly, the federally funded curriculum would side with the forces led by former Vice President Al Gore falsely contending the science is settled on all this and no room exists for debate.

If enacted, No Child Left Inside, the chief sponsor of which is Maryland Democrat Rep. John Sarbanes, would require state grant recipients to show how they were measuring "student environmental literacy" and instilling environmental know-how in teachers. Advocacy groups receiving grants would design their own evaluation and accountability plans.

Important Story Overlooked

In a September 22 statement, EdWatch Action, a citizens group in Minnesota,

called HB 3036 an "unconstitutional expansion of the federal government into the realm of education that promotes unscientific, non-academic, politically correct environmental propaganda.

"The environmental standards, curriculum, and programs funded by this bill that are to be put in every subject would take valuable time and resources from core

academic issues," the group continued. "The grants also promote programs that are supposed to teach bogus, subjective, and political concepts like self-esteem and environmental justice."

In an early autumn dominated by news of a mind-boggling \$700 billion federal bailout of financial institutions, this effort to use federal power to mandate environmentalist indoctrination throughout the nation's classrooms received little ink or airtime.

No Child Left Inside deserves a lot more attention in the context of the larger question of whether Americans should be able to choose the kinds of schools they want for their children or have to accept the standardized, politicized versions mandated by politicians, bureaucrats, and interest groups.

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

Is Your Child Being Educated or Indoctrinated?

The British High Court has ruled that Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* is partisan propaganda and contains at least 11 scientific errors. It ruled the film should not be shown in classrooms unless accompanied by a document pointing out the the scientific errors. The Court also ruled classroom time should be given for presenting an alternative view.

Is your child being forced to watch Al Gore's propaganda film? If so, you should:

- Call 312/377-4000 and request a free copy of *Education or Indoctrination? Al Gore in the Classroom*, a collection of background readings produced by The Heartland Institute.
- Talk to your child's teacher, and if necessary the principal, and ask them to remove Gore from the classroom or provide students an alternative view.
- If your child's teacher or principal isn't responsive, contact Maureen Martin, senior fellow for legal affairs for The Heartland Institute, at martin@heartland.org, for free legal assistance.

Because schools are for learning, not politics.



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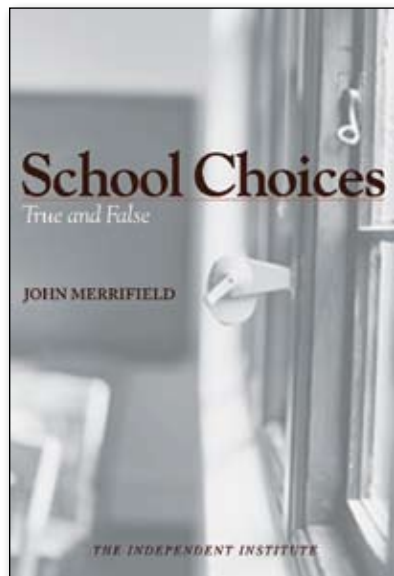
VISUALIZE SCHOOL CHOICE

The school choice movement has gained political momentum in recent years, with programs having been established in Milwaukee, Florida, Texas, and elsewhere. But today's programs are nothing like the "free market in education" proposed four decades ago by the early proponents of school choice.

Economist John Merrifield shows that the school choice movement has become mired in false alternatives, petty distinctions, and diminished vision. Yet, he argues that school choice must not be allowed to fail like so many other government reforms—a freely competitive market for education must remain the ultimate goal. ***School Choices: True and False*** charts a clear course for the achievement of this goal.

"School Choices is a first rate analysis of how the school choice idea has been dumbed down and what it will take to develop the critical elements of a competitive education industry."

—BRUNO MANNO, former Assistant Secretary for Policy and Planning, U. S. Department of Education.



by John Merrifield
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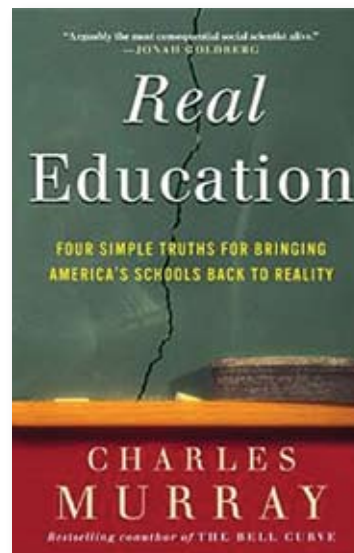
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Real Education

Four simple truths for bring
America's schools back to reality

by CHARLES MURRAY



"Charles Murray, arguably the most consequential social scientist alive, has discovered a nifty formula for fame (or infamy): One, in lucid, graceful prose describe reality using evidence and logic. Two, propose policies that actually take reality into consideration. And, three, sit back and wait for the inevitable caterwauling and lamentations of those who insist reality isn't real and who swear the crooked timber of humanity is nothing more than the malleable clay of utopian social engineers. *Real Education* follows this recipe perfectly."

—JONAH GOLDBERG
BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *LIBERAL FASCISM*

Real Education, 224 pages; Crown Forum; 1 edition (August 19, 2008)

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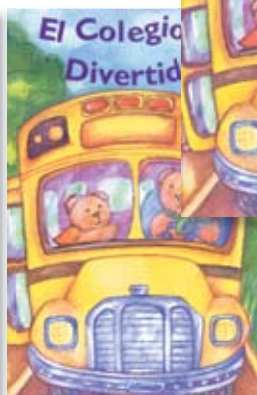
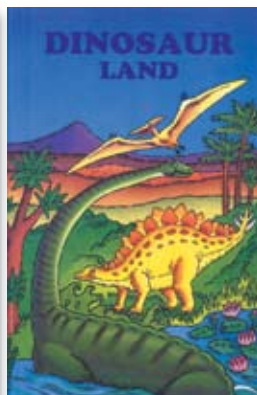


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