



the  
**CENTER FOR EDUCATION REFORM**

December 31, 2012

**To:** CER Board of Directors  
**Cc:** Supporters and Friends  
**From:** Jeanne Allen, President  
**RE:** End of Year Report, 2012

**What a year!**

The Center's leadership, staff and partners around the country logged a combined 3,400 hours *in* 12 states,<sup>1</sup> cultivating the grassroots around true education reform, educating (and sometimes pushing) lawmakers, and working with the media to get the issues right and in context. We spent additional days and hours in and around Arizona, California and New York attending or speaking at meetings, conferences and events. Each unique contact with our colleagues and those in charge of changing laws, minds and cultures makes us smarter and as is our history, we use each experience to magnify the others.

As we close 2012, I write to say thank you for helping us do just that — magnifying the work others do, influencing the course of reform, ensuring accountability and accuracy for those who carry the banner of reform and in short, creating more educational opportunities for children. In the last three years, our work has contributed to seeing 32,000 more students enrolled in eight new choice programs and 300,000 more children in 550 new charter schools!

As is our custom, I am also writing to share the highlights of the past year. I begin with our own accomplishments, transition to those that we are most proud to associate with in the movement outside of our own walls, and end with some notable mentions and experiences. There is nothing like history to help orient the mind toward the future, so thank you for spending a few minutes with us to review what's past, as we prepare for what's ahead.

**But First...**

I'm pleased to thank once again our wonderful supporters whose contributions fuel this movement. The newest:

Mary Benami • Wallace Boston, Jr. • Becky Campoverde • B.J. Cassin • Mr. and Mrs. Paul De Bruin • Deborah Finegan • Lotika Gulvadi • John Hall • Daniel Hart • Ken Hirsh • Patricia Humphrey • Dennis Keller • Lloyd and Katie Martinson • Doris Morris • Mary Pecci • Sandy Schenk • Josh Silverman • The Honorable Margaret Spellings • The Veltri Foundation • Dave Warnock • Michael Watts • Julie Young.

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<sup>1</sup> DC, Georgia, Florida, Indiana, New Jersey, North Carolina, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee.

And our honor roll of longest, continual supporters:

Robert Andrzejewski • Mike and Sharon Arata • James Archer • Tim Barton • Rick Baumgartner • Frank Baxter • Eric Becker • Katrina Becker • Barbara Bell • Fred Bialek • Frank Bonsal • III • Frank Bonsal • Jr. • Katherine & David Bradley • The Bradley Foundation • Joe Bruno & Building Hope • Bette-Jo Buhler • Charles Byrne • Durward Carter • Giuseppe Cecchi • The Challenge Foundation • Richard Cooper • The Crosbys • Ravenel and Beth Curry • Ken Davis • Philip Dietrich • Terry Eakin • John Eason • T. Willard Fair • Lorraine Finch • John and Laura Fisher • Maureen Foulke • Steve and Polly Friess • Robert Garthwait • Randy Gaschler • Philip Geiger • The Gleason Family Foundation • Bernard Gogel • James Green • Jon Hage • Steven Hart • Lisa Harvey • Tom Hayward • Thomas J. Healey • Shirley and Barnett Helzberg • Doris Hendricks • The Henkels • Donald Hense • Hickory Foundation • Laura Hornbeck • Jerry Hume • Gary Jason • Wayne Jennings • The Johnstons • Steven Kaatz • Melvin Kaplan • Robert Kay • Robert Kennedy • Norm Kimsey • Carl Kircher • Steve Klinsky • Roy Knipper • Lawrence Konz • Ron Kruis • Floyd Kvamme • Robert Lattimer • Ruth Lehenbauer • Arthur Leon • Herbert Lucas • Steve Masone • Stan Metzberg • Greg and Pam Miller • The Oberndorfs • Dennis Odle • Randy and Meg Palisoc • Linda Parrow • Chris Payne • The Peters • John Penson • Mary Perugini • Ted Poitras • George Race • William Randall • Edward Robinson • James Root • Jonathan Sackler • Michael and Ellen Sandler • Manny Savignano • Selby Saxon-Harrison • John Schilthuis • Carl Schramm • Adam Shapiro • James Shea • Jon Siegel • John Skarda • Barbara Skinner • John Smayda • Cooper Snyder • William Snyder • Shirley Sontheimer • The Spadys • Robert Strait • Donald Thomas • Tommy Tomlinson • Rita Thrasher • The Walton Family Foundation • Rawleigh Warner • Doug Watson • Bob Weekly • Helmut Weymar • Rachel Wiseman-Gerber • Jeff and Janine Yass.



## Milestones

**Parent Power!** Asked by Walden Media president to create a companion tool to help citizens who might be motivated by the movie “Won’t Back Down” (the script of which me and my team advised throughout its development), we took to the drawing board to assemble the nation’s first ever Parent Power Index© which measures the ability in each state of a parent to exercise choices – no matter what their income or child’s level of academic achievement – engage with their local school and board, and have a voice in the systems that surround their child. The Parent Power Index gives parents an interactive tool to discover whether their state affords them power – and if not, provides the tools to help them get it.

**The Media Bullpen.** We’ve created the nation’s largest aggregator of news in one place, a portion of which is publicly accessible -- and scored by base hits and pop flies -- to help the media learn where they get it right and where they miss the ball on education reform. And soon the unique and largest aggregation of news which sits in the Bullpen’s back end will be available to groups and individuals who sign up to participate more fully. We created the Bullpen to allow everyone to get in the game on the most important discussions of our day in a unique technological environment. We have conferred with our colleagues and users to develop a more useful streamlined tool, which can ensure that we serve our customers and colleagues more fully in sharing the tools we have created.

While the 2012 election may seem like it was years ago now, it was an opportunity again to stimulate and educate voters to pay more attention to whether their candidates of choice are truly supporters of the issues we most believe typify whether an elected official is likely to lead rather than follow with reform. We reintroduced **Education Fifty** and quarterbacked the gubernatorial races, issued voter guides and hosted a huge bulletin board on how the presidential candidates -- in writing and in debates and speeches -- handled the issues. We issued congratulations and recommendations to President Obama just hours after his victory and continue to press U.S. leaders to adopt a more strident position for reform.

Business and technology leaders are also getting in the reform act, and serving on the Advisory Council for **Arizona State University's** dynamic, education innovation effort has been a pleasure and has given me insights into how we can expand the pool of active, diverse, participants in the arena. One of the earliest participants in the world of financial investment in education has shaped ASU's effort. We are proud to work with Michael Moe of GSV Advisors, also a CER director, along with his partner Deborah Quazzo, in expanding the pool of companies serving our children's needs.

The **University of Pennsylvania** has also been involved in the effort to spawn new innovations in education. Through a unique partnership between the Graduate School of Education and Wharton School of Business, leaders there are drawing new entrepreneurs into education. Attending its annual event has drawn us deeper into the world of higher education, providing advice and insights as to how best to produce graduates that not only know education but how to enact solutions for its speedy reform.

**Governor John Engler** is one of those rare individuals whose impact from leading is, and will continue to be felt years after he left his post as Governor of the Great Lakes state. Now head of the business roundtable, Engler remains devoted to the cause of education reform. So when Central Michigan University honored him by naming it's highly successful charter authorizing shop after him, I jumped at the opportunity to keynote the event and join the pioneers of Michigan's charter school movement, many whom continue to influence policy in and out of the state capital.

Thanks to the compelling work of former Rep. Sally Perz, author of Ohio's charter school law and leader of its pioneering movement, the **Buckeye Charter Boards Association** exists to support and train charter board members. I was honored to speak to her group and strategize with she and the other leaders on how to best expand and shape their efforts in Ohio and beyond for years to come.

**Over the River and Through the Woods...**



...Many a grandmother's house was host to phone calling, emailing and sign creation as we rallied the grassroots around the country in support of major reform efforts:

- In Georgia, where CER added an additional 15,000 voices to the successful ballot initiative for charter schools.
- In Pennsylvania, where lawmakers finally passed a legitimate, though dramatically scaled back scholarship program for poor kids stuck in failing schools and are now poised, with a new coalition understanding substantive reform, to improve upon its long standing but troubled charter law.
- In Maine, to pass and improve its charter school law, while also initiating interest in expanding online learning opportunities.
- Through partnerships with allies in North Carolina, helping to remove the restrictive cap on the number of charter schools that could be authorized and continuing to work with leaders to unify the disjointed reform movement and support the development of new schools.
- In meetings with Tennessee's speaker of the house and lieutenant governor to lay the groundwork for charter law improvements and possible school choice legislation in the upcoming legislative session, while also drumming up support for these initiatives in the media.
- In Los Angeles, California, where we quickly weighed in to support charter leaders pushing back on a proposal that would have halted charter growth and over-burdened existing schools with irrelevant new regulations.
- By answering the call of the Idaho's Governor in developing grassroots outreach plans in support of his ballot initiatives on teacher reform.
- Advancing charter school law improvements in New Jersey and supported the creation of several new schools in the Garden State.
- Conducting public opinion polls in Tennessee, Florida and North Carolina providing leaders on the ground with compelling proof of overwhelming voter support of school choice policies.
- Fighting alongside two charter schools in Maryland to win approval after lengthy legal battles with local school boards.
- Increasing positive media coverage on reform issues in Florida by 42 percent in less than one year by launching a media outreach campaign to dispel myths and educate the public.
- Promoting exemplary choice and charter laws in states like New York, Michigan, Ohio and Washington, DC, while recruiting a new crop of activists in these states to maintain the integrity of their solid reforms.

*Overall, CER has had a significant footprint in ten states—and influence in at least ten others. Lastly, the dissemination of over 200 Action Alerts and Newswires & Analyses has generated nearly 915,000 impressions since January 2012.*

## **In The News...**

CER remains the leader in generating and stimulating accuracy in media coverage. Some highlights -- and numbers -- will demonstrate this statement.

- Nationally, CER has had 166 million impressions in the media since the beginning of the year.
- In 2012, CER increased positive media coverage of education reform issues by more than 90%, far surpassing our goal to do so by only 5%.
- CER has been featured or has contributed to major breaking news in the *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, *MSNBC* and *Fox*, to name only a few.
- In 2012 alone, CER's audience on Twitter increased by 54 percent (as measured by the number of people who "follow" CER on this platform) and by 149 percent on Facebook (as measured by the number of people who "like" CER). In combination, these two platforms now allow CER to communicate with 15,708 people, instantaneously and at essentially no cost

## **In Appreciation...**

**Kudos to the lovely and talented Alexis Morin and Catherine Bellinger**, founders of Students for Education Reform and selected as people to watch in the annual *Forbes Magazine* "30 Under 30." Alexis & Catherine are serious about learning and organizing college leaders and we believe the youth of America — with their progressive thoughts and appreciation of their precious freedom — will eventually bring us full deliverance from the monopolistic system we have today.

**Jeb Bush and his fine team** threw an outstanding conference in October in Washington, DC, bringing together policymakers, and pundits, business and technology, research and thought leaders and a few politicians to boot. It was reminiscent of conferences CER used to hold with the now defunct Education Leaders Council, only better. We always missed those gatherings that spawned from the deliberations the next year's legislative initiatives, a new crop of activists and even new schools. It's terrific to have the Foundation for Excellence in Education take up the helm of uniting so many different people and ideas under one roof and strengthening them to battle.

Speaking of Florida, congratulations to Charter School USA Founder and CEO **Jon Hage who was named Floridian of the Year** by *Florida Trend* in a major spread on the success of his school partnerships and the critical issues facing all charter schools today.

There are many issues that charter schools must grapple with today but few more pernicious than the obstacles created from people and organizations within the movement itself! I shared a few stories on **John Stossel's "Unintended Consequences"** and we've taken to documenting on paper whenever and wherever we see evidence of this relatively recent phenomenon, like when certain organizations which are hired to review charter applications reject proven school programs based on hearsay and rumors rather than evidence. It happens to small independent non-profit groups and it happens to large partnerships with for-profit

companies. More rules and regulations dictating who charters can contract with, who's on the board, how they get evaluated (differently and more stringently than traditional public schools) and more threats to undermine a movement that started to enable freedom and flexibility in pursuit of excellence, not top down control. I'm happy to share more of this if you've not seen our other writing but ask everyone involved to start reading the fine print of proposals and the actions, not just the words, of the organizations you endorse or support.

**Reform goes to the movies.** Notwithstanding the exceptional work done by Madeleine Sackler in "The Lottery" and the stark reality introduced into "Waiting for Superman," this year's "Won't Back Down" impacted the way millions have come to understand the education system. Few know how much Walden Media had to fight to make that movie and it's truth come alive. Despite the teachers unions misguided bullying tactics to deter people from going to the movies and negative impact in the media, millions of new eyes and ears saw and heard a very commonplace story of school failure and the grassroots efforts to turn that failure around. "We tell stories that recapture the imagination, rekindle curiosity, and demonstrate the rewards of virtue," reads the Walden Media tag line. Imagine that -- curiosity, imagination and virtue - in a world where violence and video games threaten our kids daily.

**Noodle.org is the Google of education** and it will have made its big debut by the time this reaches you. John Katzman's latest venture (after Princeton Review & 2tor/2U) provides a user-friendly, one stop shopping place of educational options with high quality information for the consumer and access to literally tens of thousands of different providers, schools and institutions all at your fingertips. CER is a proud partner in content and collaboration with Noodle. Be sure to noodle around it at [www.noodle.org](http://www.noodle.org).

Choice continues to be "in" and mandatory assignment is "out". That's one of the reasons that last year, during **National School Choice Week** (2012), there were 406 events across all 50 states. Thanks to the Gleason Family Foundation and NCSW director Andrew Campanella, there will be 3,500+ events across all 50 states, comprising the largest celebration of education reform in history, with 1 million+ individual participants. On January 25th, we join our friends in Phoenix for the biggest individual event for school choice (7,500 people). It's not too late to get involved. Go to [www.schoolchoiceweek.com](http://www.schoolchoiceweek.com).

### **Some Major News Before Signing off...**

As I indicated earlier, some people in the education reform movement may be in need of a quick history lesson on what reform was intended to be and do. Some who are relatively new to the field think it's about reforming a system, when in reality, the movement was intended to start a revolution, and break up a system. As Howard Fuller puts it, we need to be about creating a system of schools, open by choice and accountable to the consumers, rather than attempting to fix an irreparable school system. Sometimes we fight with our allies on this, some of whom bent putting more power into state education agencies to regulate charter, choice and other efforts. It's reminiscent — sort of — of this nation's early struggles on the tension between too much government, and not enough. To wit, I thought the words of the founding fathers might be worth consideration again:

Madison's Federalist #51 argued for the proper checks and balances of and between government interests and that government must exist, yet be limited to protect our shared as well as self-interests. "If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and **in the next place oblige it to control itself. A dependence on the people is, no doubt, the primary control on the government;** but experience has taught mankind the necessity of auxiliary precautions."

Such precautions for Ed Reformers should encourage them to want to set high standards with consequences for success or failure, but otherwise get out of the way — completely — so the people can lead, and government can act as a check, a control, but not the primary one.

Thankfully, the pioneers of school reform are still around to keep the movement in check and their ranks are bigger than a few competing interests. The movement will survive, with some hard work, the onslaught of the new regulators. But rather than speculate or hope, we have resolved to do something really BIG about it. This year, we publicly launch a project we created and have quietly worked to develop over the better part of the last three years — it's called *Education Reform University*.

Education Reform University is the nation's 1<sup>st</sup> and only effort to inform, educate and activate those who don't know much about history — at least not the history of the Ed Reform movement.

CER has amassed the largest single stockpile of history under its "roof" and in its technology 'servers'. Think Library of Congress of reform, or something more akin to a lengthy diary with which The Center for Education Reform will lead an unprecedented project to take reformers back to school, and take Americans forward in their learning about what really makes good education happen.

In addition to our new Ed Reform library at [www.edreform.com](http://www.edreform.com), we will develop certificated courses for people in the field to take and are partnering as well, with major universities to co-brand Ed Reform coursework in, and among innovative education programs and schools.

The next generation of education reformers must grow its ranks, build the human capital supply and take on the education establishment and the reform status quo. If the 1980s was Chapter One or 1.0, today should be the beginning of the Grande Finale or 4.0. The past is prologue. It's time we all learned.



My best to you and yours for a very Healthy and Happy New Year, and the strength to face our challenges together, with humility, courage and persistence!

  
Jeanne Allen