

Center for Education Reform



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Back-to- School Alert 2000

1st in a series from CER

CHARTER SCHOOL RANKS SWELL SCHOOLS AND ATTENDANCE ABOVE FORMER PROJECTIONS

(Washington, DC, 8/17/00) The story is simple: Today the Center for Education Reform released figures showing that 518,609 children will be attending charter schools this fall, up 19 1/2 % percent since the Spring. Overall 2,069 charter schools are open -- while CER expects these numbers to be slightly different once school starts and districts report changes. In addition, many school districts that have the authority to charter may not report their numbers until later this year.

Not only are more children involved in this burgeoning reform effort, but more parents and teachers are affected by charter schools than ever before, said CER President Jeanne Allen. "This welcome growth is a sign of the continued acceptance and appreciation of parents and the community for new and different kinds of schools and the benefits of school choice."

Recent reports about charter schools have been positive, and in states like Florida charter schools have boasted 36% gains serving 44% more students, in New York the amount of charter schools have quadrupled and will serve more than double the students.

Attached are the official projections for the 2000-01 school year.

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**OPERATING AND APPROVED
CHARTER SCHOOLS AND ENROLLMENT BY STATE**

*** Numbers below are based on projections and may vary as much as 10%. CER will be continuing to research and update – new numbers will be released quarterly.*

State	Schools Opened by Spring, 2000	Enrollment as of Spring, 2000	**Schools Opening Fall, 2000	**New Students
Alaska	17	1,271	0	0
Arizona	352	81,767	56	12,992
Arkansas	0	0	4	748
California	239	110,642	22	10,956
Colorado	65	16,356	11	2,772
Connecticut	16	2,138	0	0
Delaware	5	1,221	3	1,465
D.C.	31	7,881	6	1,373
Florida	111	16,757	40	10,956
Georgia	32	20,260	3	1,595
Hawaii	2	790	4	1,580
Idaho	8	918	1	110
Illinois	19	4,891	2	216
Kansas	15	1,788	0	0
Louisiana	17	3,084	6	821
Massachusetts	39	11,265	3	300
Michigan	173	49,102	8	4,000
Minnesota	59	7,171	16	2,240
Mississippi	1	334	0	0
Missouri	18	4,337	6	1,446
Nevada	5	898	1	316
New Jersey	48	10,068	14	3,450
New Mexico	3	706	8	800
New York	5	2,017	20	5,040
North Carolina	75	14,616	20	3,900
Ohio	48	10,311	37	7,770
Oklahoma	0	0	7	1,450
Oregon	4	254	9	498
Pennsylvania	47	11,715	18	5,952
Rhode Island	2	455	1	78
South Carolina	8	628	1	72
Texas	167	35,753	11	2354
Utah	3	233	1	82
Virginia	0	0	1	30
Wisconsin	55	4,170	40	3,040
Nationwide Total	1,689	433,797	380	84,812



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ANNUAL BACK-TO-SCHOOL POLL RESULTS BELIEVE DISSATISFACTION PUBLIC TO POLLSTERS: "I CAN'T GET NO ... SATISFACTION"

(Washington, DC 8/22/00) On their affection for existing public schools, to their support for testing, the public believes U.S. schools need a lot of improvement and more accountability. That's the real story in this year's Phi Delta Kappa (PDK)/Gallup poll, but it's not the story the authors are telling.

How is it — many are asking — that the annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll boasts "public approval of the public schools at an *all time high*" when 2 percent fewer people give the schools in their community As and Bs and more people give their schools a C this year than last?

With more information available than ever before from state to national assessments, the public's approval of public schools in the nation as a whole declined. Fully 4 percent fewer people give the nation's public schools As and Bs.

In their press release, PDK/Gallup paint a rosy picture of support for the status quo and growing opposition to vouchers and even charter schools. Yet a close look at the poll results — and the questions that produced the results — shows that on average, fully half of all Americans view the schools as mediocre at best. When parents normally argue that they want the best education for their child, viewing their schools as average or worse suggests anything but satisfaction. The poll's slant influences the outcomes.

For example, when defined, charter schools are said to be opposed by 47 percent of respondents. The poll narrowly defines charters as schools that "operate under a charter or contract that frees them from many of the...regulations imposed on public schools." The poll neglects to say that charters are started by parents and teachers, operate on a *performance* contract and are open to parents by choice.

Finally, PDK/Gallup offers a word scramble when asking the public their views towards full school choice, or vouchers. First they ask a devil's bargain question: "...would you prefer improving and strengthening the existing public schools or providing vouchers..." as if it's really an either/or proposition. In other voucher questions, the wording is loaded, eliciting in one case only 39 percent support for the concept and in another 45 percent support. More objective questions asked by more objective organizations yield far greater results:

- The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies poll (1999) found that 53 percent of the general population and 60 percent of the black population support a voucher system.
- The highly regarded Public Agenda Foundation found in its study *On Thin Ice* that 57 percent of the general public favor the idea of parents being given a voucher and 70 percent would seriously consider or definitely use a voucher to send their child to a private school.

More analysis of the attitudes of the public toward education reform has been prepared by the Center for Education Reform and is available at our website at www.edreform.com, along with CER's own *Survey of American's Attitudes Toward School Reform*.

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The Center for Education Reform is a national, independent, non-profit advocacy organization providing support and guidance to individuals, community and civic groups, policymakers and others who are working to bring fundamental reforms to their schools. For further information, please call (202) 822-9000 or visit our website at www.edreform.com.

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Back-to-School Alert **3rd in a series from CER**

A CLOSE LOOK AT STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT *SAT and NAEP scores reflect minimal progress*

(Washington, DC, 8/30/00) US achievement remains steady at unacceptable levels of progress, according to analysis of both the latest SAT scores and the results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

Both indicators help policymakers and the public better understand the depths of student learning. However, the SAT's myriad changes over the last several years have made it a less effective barometer of what college-bound kids know.

Blazing on network news, the College Board – sponsor of the SATs – boasted that SAT math scores hit a “30 year high... reflecting strong gains for American Education.” Not so coincidentally, in 1996, the College Board said the SATs were at a record high in 25 years. Not said is that the kids who've taken the test over the last five years ARE TAKING A DIFFERENT TEST!

The Facts About the SATs:

- *The tests have changed dramatically.* The math test as of 1995 allows students to use calculators and gives them an additional 30 minutes. In 1999 it was reported that questions with alleged bias were purged, including math questions upon which the College Board found that some groups (i.e. minorities, woman, etc) performed more poorly.

Despite additional changes to the verbal section, verbal SAT scores remain constant at the recentered 2000 score of 505. Beginning in 1995, the students taking the SAT saw fewer questions, longer reading passages, and no antonym section. Tutoring firms say the “new” SAT is more coachable.

- *Highest Scorers Losing Ground.* The largest decline over the last two decades continues to be among top scoring students. In 1990, 4 percent of students reported grade averages of A+ and averaged 622 on verbal and 631 on math. This year, 7 percent report A+ averages and their SAT scores dropped to 610 and 628 for verbal and math, respectively. Over the twenty years from '75-95, the number of college bound students who scored above 600 on the verbal test slipped 36%.
- *Minorities Gain Ground But Only Slightly:* The scores of African-Americans and Hispanics, for example, increased 6 points and two points, respectively, in ten years in verbal, and similar gains in math. African-Americans still trail whites by 104 in math and 94 in verbal.

The NAEP scores magnify these trends, but this year's report makes comparisons to previous proficiency scores almost impossible. It's not clear why, and we'll be studying it closely over the days to come, but for now, it's clear that students are still at significantly lower levels of achievement than the reports may indicate:

For example, nine-year old reading scores haven't improved since 1980. In math, 17 year olds saw a slight increase in scores, and gradually 13 year olds have marked a six-point increase, but in both reading and math, the black-white achievement gap has widened, despite reports that blacks are taking more advanced courses. In science, there was a slight dip for high school seniors and nine-year olds.

Across the board, while more attentions being paid to education, and pressure is mounting on the existing system to improve, more coursework and better grades aren't translating into better results.

More data and past years' analysis of these achievement trends can be found at CER's website at www.edreform.com. Just hit the *Back to School* button!

(Next *Back to School* report: A look at the reasons beyond why we are making marginal progress, and how, contrary to the Rand report, real structural reforms factor into progress for many children.)

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