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HOT-LINE

1999

JUNE

Hot-line June 23, 1999

Hello and welcome to the Center for Education Reforms weekly hot-line, this week beginning June 23.

As we thought suits have been filed in Florida in protest to Jeb Bush's A+ choice program by the NAACP and the ACLU. What remains to be seen is if the justice will issue an injunction or allow the program to proceed while considering the suits. Stay tuned as we track this issue.

Pennsylvania legislators walked away from Governor Ridge's much anticipated Academic Recovery Act legislation. After hours negotiations were unable to yield a resolution. We commend Governor Ridge for his efforts and look forward to the Fall when the legislators will revisit the issue.

North to Vermont, the Supreme Court found that religious schools cannot be included in the choices available to the states children.

In California' charter schools have been bearing the brunt of anti-charter efforts all Spring long. Finally a brief respite, the bill that awaits the Governor's signature is free of union controls on charter schools.

All across the country the buzz words in reform focus on some level on teachers. I think that any of us would be hard pressed to find someone who honestly says that teachers make too much money! But some teachers unions are actually opposing proposals to raise teacher pay across the board. Fearing that this private-sector practice [supply & demand] would undercut union strength! This added to their already standard disapproval of merit based pay.

Well technology may play ~~apart~~ in breaking that camels back. A tool developed at the University of Tennessee measures student performance at the beginning and end of the school year. Refined, this tool could someday be used to help set teacher salaries

And finally our salute to ^{an} Arizona charter school, The Arizona School for the Arts (ASA), where performing arts are combined with rigorous academics. Principle Dr. Mark Francis should be commended for the success of the class of 1999, which received more than 50 thousand dollars in merit scholarships, with all thirteen graduates going on to attend universities this Fall. To contact ASA, call 602-257-1444.

Thanks for calling the Center for Education Reforms weekly hot-line, if you need further information, please call our offices at 1-800-521-2118. Have a great day!

Subject: re: Washington Post TODAY

Date: Fri, 18 Jun 99 13:44:50 -0500

From: Mary Kayne Heinze <mkayne@edreform.com>

To: "Robin Coblyn" <rcoblyn@ix.netcom.com>

CC: "Jeanne Allen" <jra@edreform.com>

Robin

All ready got the info

Wash Times also picked up on charter revocation of Young Technocrat school -- I'll check out and retain my personal copy at home -- today's other clips had no real news -- we were without internet and email for the entire am . . . so I got into that to check out later in the am -- nothing really newsy -- below is an editorial from USA Today from a couple of days ago. . .

Regarding the new PG County Superintendent . . . from what I saw of her news conference -- her number one goal is going to be getting non-certified teachers off the rolls. That in itself doesn't sound like our kind of gal. . .

06/17/99- Updated 10:40 PM ET

Tying teacher pay, performance

Try to imagine a profession entrusted with preparing the nation's future that offers starting salaries of less than \$25,735. That's the situation in teaching, according to a salary survey to be released Monday by the American Federation of Teachers.

And teacher pay doesn't improve markedly with time. After 10 years, average salaries still fall short of \$40,000.

Small wonder, then, that teachers in Shreveport, La., can earn nearly as much moonlighting as blackjack dealers at Harrah's as teaching middle school science.

And small wonder that many schools are having trouble either recruiting or hanging on to teachers: 40% of new teachers leave within the first five years.

The first step to solving the problem is obvious: raising teacher salaries across the board.

You won't get any argument from teachers on that. But some local teacher unions are actually opposing proposals to target teacher raises - fearing that this common private-sector practice would undercut union strength.

Supply and demand, for example, isn't a concept embraced by most teacher unions.

When software writers earn more than civil engineers, it is accepted as a reality of the marketplace. But teachers in Wichita, Kan., recently nixed a school district proposal to offer \$1,800 stipends for scarce special education teachers.

The union complained it was unfair to those teaching subjects such as English, in which there are few job openings.

Likewise, the idea of performance-based pay is being fought in many school districts nationwide.

Yet not all teachers are equal, and new technology is emerging that can identify the relative effectiveness of teachers.

One tool developed by William Sanders at the University of Tennessee - called "value-added" research - measures student performance at the beginning and end of the school year. In doing so, it tracks how successful individual teachers are at educating students.

With further refinement, this tool for identifying effective teaching could someday be used to help set teacher salaries.

Already, hybrid forms of performance-based compensation are under discussion in Denver, Delaware and Florida. Kentucky has used a form of performance pay for years, granting extra money to schools in "rewards" for exceeding state-set expectations.

Teachers in Delaware who now are fighting a performance-based contract proposed by the governor should take a look at the contract signed in Douglas County, Colo., a fast-growing Denver suburb. While that contract falls short of linking teacher pay to student test scores, it moves in the direction of linking teacher quality with teacher pay.

Douglas Hartman, president of the Colorado Federation of Teachers, backs the contract, saying that unless teachers adapt to changing times, less-favorable changes will be forced upon them.

He's right. And the current movement leads in the direction of a more respected, better-paid teaching profession.

Subject: VT, PA, CA

Date: Fri, 18 Jun 1999 10:12:15 -0400

From: "DDeSchryver" <DDeSchryver@prodigy.net>

To: "Robin" <robin@edreform.com>

CA: The State Budget was approved by the Senate and Assembly on Wednesday, June 16th and sent to the Governor for his signature. The very welcome news is

that the language that would have closed or partially closed 1/3 of all of California's charter schools or imposed independent study law is not in the Budget Bill or the Omnibus Education Budget Trailer Bill.

PA: At 4:15am Thursday morning, Pennsylvania legislators walked away from Governor Ridge's Academic Recovery Act legislation. After hours of negotiations, the House and Senate members could not compromise on any form of a scaled down pilot school accountability and choice program. We commend the efforts of Governor Tom Ridge and look forward to the fall when they will revisit the issue.

VT: On June 11, 1999 The Vermont Supreme Court ruled that inclusion of religious schools in the state's 100-year-old plus tuitioning (or choice) program violates the state constitution. "We express no opinion on how the State of Vermont can or should address this deficiency should it attempt to craft a complying tuition-payment scheme," the court wrote. "We decide only that the current statutory system, with no restrictions on the purpose or use of the tuition funds, violates Article 3." The result is that Vermonters can still exercise choice, but it must be non-sectarian. The ruling's effects is isolated in Vermont.

NO update on OH as of yet.

Flattence

THE BELLWETHER

News from Arizona's Charter School Front

Vol. II Issue 22

June 2, 1999

First Class

It has been four school years since the first Arizona charter schools opened their doors. As a result, the Class of 1999 is the first with graduates who have spent their entire high school career at a charter school. They are the first; they have that in common. Yet, this is a diverse group. For some of them, high school graduation is a doorway to many more years of demanding academics. For others, it is the realization of a dream that once seemed out of reach or even unimportant. Appropriately, the charter schools that served these graduates are also diverse.

As might be expected at the Arizona School for the Arts (ASA), where performing arts are combined with rigorous academics, the graduation experience was grand. Graduation week began with the Senior Banquet on Monday, followed by a performance showcase on Tuesday night and culminated with the graduation ceremony on Wednesday. Held at the newly restored Orpheum Theatre, a sense of tradition prevailed as each class processed down the aisle flanking the banner they designed. To reach this moment, ASA students completed arduous academic requirements along with their artistic endeavors. Principal Dr. Mark Francis compares the "emotion packed" moment when the seniors finally threw their mortarboards in the air to that felt at a military academy graduation.

ASA's Class of 1999 received more than \$50,000 in merit scholarships and all thirteen of the graduates will attend universities in the fall. Several have been accepted into the Honors College at Arizona State University, while others will attend such fine schools as the University of Southern California Film School and Sarah Lawrence College in New York.

GateWay Community High School, located on the campus of GateWay Community College, awarded diplomas to 68 students this year. The GWCHS population is comprised of 16-21 year old "adult students," in grades 10-12. The open enrollment and accelerated program allows students to earn a diploma at their own pace. The curriculum is designed to accommodate both students who plan to go directly from graduation to the work force and those who plan to continue their education. Historically, about 27 percent go on to post-secondary institutions.

This program is very beneficial for some students. After a little more than a year at GateWay, Kimberly Higgins, earned 11 high school and 6 college credits. The 1999 graduate also received both the President's Scholarship and the Regents Academic Scholarship from Arizona State University, where she plans to study business. These awards represent more than \$14,000 in assistance. According to Principal Marge Metcalf, Kim's success is due to an "amazing amount of dedication and perseverance."

About six hundred attended the graduation ceremony at Mesa Centennial Hall for the 17 graduates of Heritage Academy. When it opened in 1995, Heritage had 6 graduates. Students come from miles away to attend this traditional school in Mesa. The Heritage curriculum emphasizes "a knowledge of and respect for the ideals and values of the great men and women of history." In keeping with this philosophy, top graduates are eligible for the George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Dolly Madison Awards. The school also awards financial scholarships based on grade point averages. In its first three years of operation about 85 percent of Heritage's students went on to a college or university.

Arizona Call-a-Teen Center of Excellence has a population many consider "at-risk." Here, too, graduates realize a dream. For many of them, it is a dream that once seemed unattainable. Administrators expect a full house at graduation where 600 seats are available for the friends and families of the 33 graduates. Principal Gloria Junkersfeld believes that were it not for schools like Call-a-Teen, many of these kids would not be graduating.

Each and every one of these graduates had the courage to try something new - to attend a charter school when many people had never heard of such a thing. Some wanted more from their education. Some would not give up though others had written them off. Some needed a place to feel comfortable, somewhere they would fit in. Whatever the reason, for these students a charter school was the answer. Their success proves that. *Congratulations Class of 1999!*

Next Week: Charter School Mentors



THE CENTER FOR MARKET-BASED EDUCATION IS A CENTER WITHIN THE GOLDWATER INSTITUTE
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New York Report

+ YNE A25

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 16, 1999

The New York Times

State's First Independent Schools Are Picked, and Criticism Is Swift

By ANEMONA HARTOCOLLIS

A state board selected the first eight charter schools for New York State yesterday, setting the stage for a new and hotly disputed system of taxpayer-financed schools operating outside the regular public school system. Four of them will be run by profit-making corporations, and one will be in a school building owned by a church.

The newly created charter schools, like those in other states, will receive public money but be freed from the constraints of local school district rules and union contracts.

But the most radical change for the state and for New York City is the inclusion of profit-making schools in the first round of selections. The teachers' union, a powerful lobbying force in Albany, has fought hard against creating schools outside the public system and particularly opposes profit-making companies' running charter schools. So do most school superintendents in the state, including Chancellor Rudy Crew in New York City.

The schools — five in New York City, one in Long Island and two upstate — will have state, Federal and local financing, about \$6,000 a pupil, with more for special education students, state officials said. Some public school officials have complained that the charter schools will drain money and the best students from the existing public schools. Advocates say they will encourage competition and innovation.

The schools chosen yesterday represent a mix of ethnic and regional interests, from a Dominican-oriented school in Washington Heights to a Chinese-oriented school in Flushing, Queens, and a school sponsored by the Urban League in Albany. Three schools will open in the fall, and the other five in the fall of 2000. Among the first three, two are profit-making, one in New York City and one in Albany. The third, also in New York City, will be nonprofit.

The profit-making school in New



Marilynn K. Yee/The New York Times

Selecting the first charter schools in New York State. Standing, from left, are three officials of the Sisulu Children's Academy in Harlem, one of the schools: Steven B. Klinsky, Marshall Mitchell and John Elwell.

York City brings together civil rights advocates, community and church leaders and wealthy Wall Street executives, who say they are looking for alternatives to failing public schools in poor neighborhoods. It will be called the Sisulu Children's Academy, after Walter Sisulu, the South African opponent of apartheid, friend of Nelson Mandela and fellow leader of the African National Congress.

Union officials attacked the initial round of selections yesterday, saying that they had been made in secret and that they appeared to advance the interests of private companies in taking over education.

Gov. George E. Pataki, who pushed hard for the charter school legislation, hailed the first round of schools yesterday as "the single greatest improvement in education in state history."

The charters, or operating agreements, will be granted for five years and monitored by the State Universi-

ty of New York and the State Board of Regents. Schools must meet the academic standards in their charters, or the charters can be withdrawn. The standards vary from school to school, but charter school students have to take all state tests given in other public schools.

No details were given yesterday on how the students would be chosen, but in a typical charter system, students apply to a particular school and, if there are more applicants than places, are chosen by lottery.

The eight schools approved yesterday, out of 15 applicants so far, all begin in kindergarten and have varying grade levels. Most plan to grow gradually to middle and high school grades.

Mr. Pataki's staff was briefed on the charter school applications, said Scott W. Steffey, a vice chancellor at SUNY, which has the legal authority to issue charters for 50 new schools. But Mr. Steffey said the Governor

and his staff had played no role in selecting the schools.

The schools were approved unanimously yesterday by the SUNY trustees, meeting in midtown Manhattan.

The Sisulu Academy, the profit-making school in New York City, will be run by Victory Schools Inc., a private management company set up by Steven B. Klinsky, a general partner in Forstmann, Little & Company, the leveraged buyout firm. Another partner, Theodore J. Forstmann, made news two months ago when he raised \$170 million for scholarships to send poor children to private schools, attracting a million applicants nationwide for 40,000 slots.

Sisulu will be in a school building owned by the Canaan Baptist Church of Christ in Harlem, at 115th Street between St. Nicholas and Lenox Avenues, but officials said that in accordance with the charter law, no religious instruction would be given, and that the church would be only a landlord. Rent, Mr. Klinsky said, will be about \$16,000 a month, which he said was market rate.

The Rev. Wyatt Tee Walker, senior pastor of the church and a former aide to the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., lobbied heavily for the charter school legislation in Albany.

Mr. Klinsky said he came to the building through Marshall Mitchell, a former chief of staff to the Rev. Floyd Flake, the former Congressman and pastor of the Allen A.M.E. Church in Queens. Mr. Flake also supported the charter legislation, and said yesterday that he planned to apply for the next round.

Mr. Klinsky said yesterday: "One of the toughest things in the charter school movement is going to be to find real estate. It's a beautiful new building, and Harlem is so symbolically important a place to start."

He said he expected to earn a profit by managing the school more efficiently than other public schools. He and other applicants said they expected to get \$6,000 per pupil in state, Federal and local spending,

about \$2,000 less than New York City spends on its students. The typical profit margin for a charter school in other states is 7 to 15 percent, according to Mr. Steffey.

All but one of the charter schools are starting with fewer than 250 students, which under the law will make them exempt from teachers' union contracts, even if they grow in later years, Mr. Steffey said.

The New Covenant Charter School in the Arbor Hill neighborhood of Albany, which is also to open this fall, will start with 550 students, under a provision that allows 10 schools to exceed 250 students and still be exempt from the contract. It will be managed by Advantage Schools, a profit-making company, in conjunction with the Urban League of Northeastern New York.

The third school to open this fall is the John A. Reisenbach Charter School, a nonprofit school to be run by the Learning Project Inc., which already runs a small public school, the Learning Project, in the East Village. It will also be in Harlem, at Lenox Avenue and 126th Street.

The Reisenbach School has received consulting help from the Center for Educational Innovation, a education research group in Manhattan that was involved in helping to draft the charter school legislation.

Although the center and Dr. Walker both lobbied for charter schools, the SUNY trustees said yesterday that their lobbying had nothing to do with the choice of schools so far.

Robert A. Carillo, an official of the state teachers union, accused the trustees of violating a state law that calls for school districts to be notified before a local charter is issued. Mr. Steffey said he had waited until yesterday to notify school districts because of deadline pressures to approve schools for fall.

The Regents have review power over the choices, but not veto power. The Regents can also approve 50 charter schools, but no one has applied to them yet, a spokesman said.

June 13, 1999

National Report

The New York Times

Arizona District Profits From Charter Schools

By TAMAR LEWIN

HIGLEY, Ariz. — The transformation of the Higley Elementary District, a tiny one-school district out where Phoenix's sprawl gives way to cows and corn, began two years ago with an unlikely plan to build a school whose central feature would be a hockey rink.

Arizona had passed the nation's most liberal law authorizing charter schools in 1994, and a Higley school board member who plays ice hockey, knowing the huge demand for a rink time, thought it would be great to start a new school, supported by taxpayers, that offered figure-skating and hockey instruction.

While the hockey school never materialized, those discussions moved Higley's Superintendent, Larry C. Likes, to another plan: using the state's new law to earn money for his struggling district by chartering schools throughout the state.

Today, in a striking illustration of how charter schools can stir innovation in the most unexpected places, the Higley district has one small elementary school for its own students and two dozen charter schools scattered across Arizona.

Most states — including New York, where the first charter schools are to open in the fall — are just beginning to grapple with a future in which families will be able to choose among dozens of public schools operating under charters that hold them to state standards, but give them freedom to experiment and independence in hiring and spending.

But Arizona is already living it. The state now has more than 300 charter schools, more than 70 in Phoenix alone, serving nearly 5 percent of all students.

The schools are mushrooming all over, from the River of Life Church in Phoenix to a concrete dome on a Navajo reservation. There are charter schools for students at risk of problems, for pregnant students, for those who want back-to-basics curriculums, or performing arts. Some are run by parents, some by experienced educators; some have no certified teachers at all, and some are even run by companies operating schools for profit.

States differ widely in who can grant and oversee the charter, or contract, for a new school. Arizona offers three options. Two state boards award the overwhelming majority of charters.

But any local district can also issue charters — and that was Higley's opportunity. Few districts have shown interest in chartering schools, which they see as extra competition, extra work and if a charter school fails, as some have, a source of negative headlines.

For Higley, issuing charters was an entrepreneurial act. The district decided to raise money for its 281 pupil elementary school by chartering schools and charging a percentage of their annual budget for overseeing them.

Twenty-one Higley charter schools opened their doors last fall, fouling the year in planning, and this spring the district granted five more charters. The schools earned Higley about \$350,000 this year.

Even without the hockey rink some educators say, Superintendent Likes may be pushing the charter school movement onto untested ice.

"When we heard what Higley was planning, we were concerned about insuring quality," said the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Lisa Graham Keegan, a strong advocate of school choice. "I called Larry and said, 'Just make sure you have a way to vet these schools.' But I think they have done a good job."

In the nation's debate over school choice and how the burgeoning experiments with charters and vouchers will affect public education, Mr. Likes is in a unique position — squarely, positively, on both sides.

As Superintendent of a cash-strapped district, he understands the challenges of public education, the budget issues, the discipline problems, the difficulties of finding certified math teachers. He has even lost students to two state-chartered schools within his own district.

At the same time, he is a powerful force in the charter movement, responsible for an array of schools that siphon thousands of students, and millions of dollars, from other districts. No wonder that some education officials call Mr. Likes "the charter king," an honor somewhat akin to being President Ronald Reagan's "welfare queen."

"Most public schools are very anti-charter, so there's still some bitterness," Mr. Likes said. "I understand that, as a superintendent. You don't want to lose students, and not have the resources to expand your budget."

"But as someone in both worlds, I think public schools have to get over thinking we can be all things to all people. There are a lot of kids for whom public school just doesn't work, and I'm tickled to see all the neat things the charters we've put out there are doing."

The state's large school districts may not be tickled, but they are getting used to the new competition.

"The marketplace has changed in Arizona and it's a new ball game," said James Zaharis, Superintendent

of the 71,000-student Mesa School District, Arizona's largest, which has lost about 2,000 students to charter schools, including the Sequoia School, the largest Higley charter. "We all have to adapt and be responsive. Larry's been very astute."

Mr. Likes described how he warmed to the idea of issuing charters to earn money for school computers for his district:

"I was originally very reluctant. There had to be a revenue stream or there was no reason to do it. I knew it would be a lot of work, and I knew some districts that had gotten into chartering had run into trouble, and the last thing we needed was negative headlines."

"But we've been terribly cash-strapped for years, and if this was a way to get us the technology we

Pushing an innovative school movement onto new ground.

needed, I was willing to take a look. When parents here asked why we were getting into this whole charter thing, I told them it was to pay for our computers, and they were satisfied."

As word spread that Higley would consider granting charters, both existing schools and groups looking to start new schools began lining up for applications.

Some chose Higley because of a quirk in the state law that reimburses transportation costs differently for schools chartered by local districts and schools chartered by a state board. The state-chartered schools get a flat payment per student, while the local districts are paid per mile, yielding more money for schools whose students commute from far away.

Other schools come for Mr. Likes's decades of education experience, first in Illinois and then, since 1981, as a principal and business manager

in Arizona schools. "Larry's been there, done that," said Adele Ferrini, the director of the Learning Institute, a small Phoenix school that features computer-assisted learning for at-risk students.

Ms. Ferrini formerly taught at the large public high school in Tempe and created the Learning Institute precisely to help the kind of students she said fell through the cracks there. She got her original charter from another district, but switched to Higley this year.

"If you have questions," Ms. Ferrini said, "you're calling someone else who's in the trenches with you."

Mr. Likes requires Higley-chartered schools to work with a private accounting firm, which oversees their budgets and payrolls. He requires representatives of each school to attend four meetings a year, and he visits the schools, though in the first year he got through only one round of visits because the schools are so far flung. Next year he is hoping to hire someone to help him.

The Learning Institute, in what used to be warehouse space in back of a biodegradable cleaning-solvent business, consists of a couple of computer labs, a couple of meeting rooms, and nothing much that looks like a classroom. Each student is assessed upon entering the school, and from then on, spends about half of each day at the computer, choosing from a menu of individualized lessons. During a recent visit, one young man was multiplying fractions, while at the next computer a younger girl did a punctuation drill, then a geography lesson.

Adults circulate, ready to help whenever a young person is stymied, bored, or just in need of a change of pace. While there are no traditional periods, the day is broken up by classes in "life skills," art and karate. Some students come in the morning, others in the afternoon, and each follows a different program, reflecting skills and interests.

Jennifer Nepa, a parent who works at the school, said it had been a blessing for her boys, Justin and Cody.

"It's hard to keep school a challenge if you're trying to teach the same thing to 30 kids, who all go at different paces," Ms. Nepa said.

"Here there's not the peer pressure or the competition, because there's no expectation that everyone should be at the same place."

Ms. Ferrini, an experienced educator, calls Higley only rarely. But Mr. Likes receives calls nearly every day from the founder of the Phoenix Academy for the Performing Arts, Don Haynes, a retired U.S. West technician with no education background.

One recent morning, the query was whether or not the academy, whose principal left midyear, should expand to full-day kindergarten next year.

In Higley, Mr. Likes listened to the question, leaned back and advised caution: "You know, Don, just because you decide to offer all-day kindergarten, the kids' attention span doesn't get any longer. You have to think about what you're going to do about a nap and what you're going to do with them all afternoon."

Another Higley charter in Phoenix, Westland School, existed as a small family-oriented private school — run by volunteers who charged minimal tuition — before the charter law. For Westland, which has 230 students and a long waiting list, the law offered a chance at receiving state money.

Still, Kathy Couch, a mother of eight who runs the school, said the staff decided to wait out the first year, concerned that state financing would carry too many restrictions.

In Westland's portable classrooms and trailers, students of different ages, backgrounds and achievement levels mix easily, and it is not uncommon to see an older student helping in the kindergarten or a teacher's 3-year old playing in the sixth-grade classroom.

If Ms. Ferrini's school is high-tech and computer-based, Ms. Couch's is more "The Waltons." Most of the teachers have children attending the school, and the Couch family is much in evidence. The sheer variety of the charters is the whole point, Mr. Likes said.

"We don't tell them how to run things," he said. "These schools can try out their ideas, and anyone who doesn't like them doesn't have to go there."

The Star.**BACK TO...****Home****NEWS****SPORTS****BUSINESS****FYI****LOCAL****SHOWTIME****First KC charter school opens its doors**By **TANIKA WHITE** - *The Kansas City Star*

Date: 06/14/99 22:15

When Angel Carter-Walker saw the hefty back-to-basics curriculum at Della Lamb Elementary Charter School, she knew her 7-year-old son Maurte' wouldn't be going back to the Kansas City School District.

She and her husband discussed the pros and cons and agreed to switch from the stability of a more traditional public school to the promises of an experimental charter school.

On Monday, a grinning and bouncy Maurte' joined more than 130 other students for the first day of school at Della Lamb, the first of Kansas City's 15 charter schools to open its doors to students.

The Walkers are crossing their fingers that the experiment works.

"I looked at the curriculum and I was just amazed at what they were going to try to teach them as opposed to what he was learning in the Kansas City School District," said Carter-Walker.

Surprisingly, she said, Maurte' wasn't opposed to being in school year-round, one way Della Lamb differs from traditional public schools.

"He had a dentist's appointment today," said Carter-Walker, "and all day long he was asking me, 'When are we going to my new school? When are we going to school?'"

Enthusiasm like Maurte's was rampant Monday in the building at 1000 Charlotte St.

"School is fun," said Ebony Williams, 8, who started third grade Monday at Della Lamb. "School can help you learn. It makes you feel good about yourself."

Ebony also didn't mind being in school in mid-June, although her summer vacation from Scarritt Elementary School lasted just one week.

"I wanted to be in school in the summer so I can be smart," she said.

The Della Lamb Elementary Charter School also is the first charter school ever to open in Missouri.

Most of the charter school's students left schools in the Kansas City district, said Judy Akers, associate director of Della Lamb Community Services, the charter's parent organization.

Almost all are classified as low-income, and about 40 percent come from families who already use one or more of Della Lamb's other services, such as welfare-to-work, child care, adult basic education, or youth or food programs.

Charter schools typically receive the same amount of state money

per student as any public school, but are free of a district's central

office. They must operate under a contract with a sponsor, be able to measure student achievement and be responsible for the school's finances. In exchange, they are free from traditional school rules and regulations.

Kansas City school board President John Rios said the district is viewing charter schools such as Della Lamb as healthy competition.

"Certainly parents know what's best for their child, and whether that be a charter school or the district, that's their choice," Rios said. "The district has been going through a number of changes...to improve academics and become unitary. That is our

challenge and we are going to meet that."

Among the perks at Della Lamb is that all students eat free breakfast and lunch, and every family is entitled to 100 pounds of free groceries each month per child enrolled.

But most families chose the school for academic reasons, Akers said. The Walkers, for example, didn't know the food perk existed.

"I think (parents) are walking in the door because they want a better education for their child," Akers said.

One of the school's biggest selling points is its relatively small class sizes. Most classes have a 12-1 student-teacher ratio. The biggest classes have 15 students.

"I don't want to see any more students in the fifth grade who can't read who have attended the same school since kindergarten," said Principal Hester Ladd, who was a teacher and administrator in the Kansas City School District for nearly 12 years. "I don't want to be mediocre."

The charter school will offer something else that the district does not -- values education, which is an aspect many parents requested of the school when enrolling, Ladd said.

"I think a lot of values have been lost," she said. "And I think it is the schools' responsibility to begin reinstating those values. And parents expect that."

All along the school's hallways, posters and banners remind students to be "good citizens" -- respectful, honest, compassionate, responsible.

Jennifer Vacca's fourth-grade class talked Monday morning about what such words meant.

Vacca is a first-year teacher from Central Missouri State University, which is sponsoring the charter school. Officials from CMSU have said they wanted to use the charter schools it sponsors as urban labs for its professors, graduates and teachers-in-training.

So far the charter school has hired 11 teachers, four of them from CMSU. There still are teaching positions open, because the school's enrollment was increasing hourly Monday and is expected to grow more over the next few weeks.

"The numbers of classrooms at each grade level are going to change. We're already full at the kindergarten level," Akers said. "I really think that parents are looking for an alternative."

To reach Tanika White, education reporter, call (816) 234-4415 or send e-mail to twhite@kcstar.com

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REVIEW & OUTLOOK

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL WEDNESDAY, JUNE 16, 1999

Asides

Anti-Voucher Arguments

You know an issue is gaining ground when its opponents start going for the mud. School vouchers have reached that point. In Pennsylvania, where two choice programs may well pass the state legislature this week, the anti-voucher forces are slinging like crazy. Last week, Democratic State Representative Joseph Preston warned at a press conference that a voucher law might make it possible for religious organizations to use public money to defend "pedophiles" and "child abuse" in court. The Post-Gazette reported that Mr. Preston then insisted hotly that—of course—he was not "singling out teachers or

priests" or a specific religious group. Next up, Bucks County school superintendents then sent a public letter suggesting that vouchers would transform the peaceable Keystone state into a Balkan hotbed: "The current war in Kosovo is a graphic example of what happens in a society that separates people and fosters elitism." Finally, the Pennsylvania State Education Association weighed in, warning that a Pennsylvania with a vouchers program might descend to the depths of authoritarian Chile. The PSEA even posted a photo of General Pinochet until protests made the union pull the picture. What comes next, we wonder, in the voucher *Kulturkampf*?

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Front Page

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Districts could craft their own vouchers

A revised bill in Pa. would put school choice under local control. A vote in the legislature may come today.

By Glen Justice

and Rena Singer

INQUIRER HARRISBURG BUREAU



HARRISBURG - A plan to allow local school districts statewide to create their own school-voucher programs will be part of the controversial school-choice bill lawmakers may vote on today.

The plan, if enacted, would mark a significant broadening of a proposal announced previously by Gov. Ridge.

"It's local choice," said Stephen MacNett, general counsel to Senate Republicans. "It allows advocates and opponents to work this out on the local level."

Gov. Ridge's Academic Recovery Act will be the basis for the new bill — with several key changes. (AP Photo / Paul Vathis)

The proposal, which leaders are still negotiating, would give academically distressed school districts two years to improve or students would be able to take advantage of vouchers.

Among them are the Philadelphia and Chester Upland School Districts. Chester Upland students would be immediately eligible for vouchers because the district is already under state control.

The bill also gives any school district in the state the ability to apply for relief from state mandates, including on matters of curriculum.

Senate Majority Leader F. Joseph Loeper (R., Delaware) said the elements included were aimed at gaining the necessary votes to pass the legislation. Delaware County lawmakers, including Loeper, were particularly interested in having their districts participate in vouchers. The current proposal allows each district's school board to vote on that.

Under Ridge's plan, only certain, academically failing districts would have been involved.

There is still no final text of a bill to bring school choice to Pennsylvania even though Gov. Ridge and Republican legislative leaders have been embroiled in the vouchers drive for months.

Now, however, time is running extremely short. The legislature plans to break for its summer holiday tomorrow, and voucher advocates want a vote before they leave. Leaders in both chambers and administration officials negotiated into the evening yesterday and are expected to continue this morning to come up with a final bill that could be voted on today.

Several key elements have emerged from negotiations that are likely to be included in the bill, according to Republicans close to the talks.



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The Oregonian

THE FULL STORY

Bell rings, but test results are tardy

Most Oregon sophomores will begin summer break not knowing whether they've earned certificates of initial mastery

Sunday, June 13, 1999

By Lisa Daniels and Steven Carter of The Oregonian staff

If Oregon's high school sophomores were grading the state's educators, they would give them, at best, an incomplete.

Sophomores this year were the first students eligible to earn the certificate showing they met the state's tough new academic standards.

But most 10th-graders across Oregon will start their summers not knowing whether they've successfully reached the high bar or will have to leap for it again next fall.

"I'd like to know if I passed the requirements and whether I have to worry about it," said Daniel Sanderman, a sophomore at Portland's Wilson High School.

The wait represents another bug in the implementation of Oregon's sweeping school reform that aims to ensure students are mastering skills and are not simply moved along. As the school reform moved from theory to practice this year, the chorus of complaints about how it is being carried out has become louder.

Though educators had hoped to inform sophomores whether they earned certificates before the school year ended, many don't have all the information they need to draw any conclusions.

In most cases, schools are still determining whether students passed all the eight classroom assignments required to earn a certificate. And in most instances, school officials still are waiting for confirmation of the results of the 10th-grade math problem-solving test, one of four state assessments that students must also pass to earn a certificate of initial mastery.

"I think it's inexcusable," said Mike Conrath, a math teacher at Centennial High School and a reform advocate.

Pat Burk, assistant to the Portland superintendent, said, "In some ways it is anticlimactic if the kid doesn't get the CIM at the end of the school year."

State Schools Superintendent Stan Bunn acknowledged the frustration.

"I do believe it would be much better to have all the results in the spring, both to measure schools and to tell students where they stand," he said. "I think that will come."

But timing is important. When students don't get their scores the same year they take the tests, they get the sense that maybe the tests -- and the certificates themselves -- aren't important, teachers say.

"I think it's kind of stupid," said 16-year-old Lidia Crainic, a sophomore at Portland's Cleveland High School.

The wait also frustrates many teachers who already are feeling the pressure of preparing and administering four assessments and grading eight work samples while also teaching and grading students traditionally on the curriculum required by the state.

"Many of the teachers are overwhelmed," said Dennis Urso, evaluations specialist for the Eugene School District. "Teachers are saying, 'I have to do both of these things, so what is more important?' It's hard."

Bunn said the mountain of new paperwork facing teachers is one reason the State Board of Education decided to freeze the number of work

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samples students have to complete next year rather than introduce more. But he and others believe the new CIM assessment system will get easier.

"Will the system run better in the future? Yes. Will it be accepted by teachers? The jury is still out," said David Conley, a University of Oregon education professor.

Many school districts will spend the summer figuring out who earned a certificate based on test scores and work samples. Some plan to send home letters to students who earned a certificate, honoring them during the next school year.

A survey of school districts by The Oregonian earlier this year showed educators didn't expect more than half the students to earn certificates this year. Preliminary results reviewed by some high schools around the state reflect that.

Despite huge gains on the reading, writing and math problem-solving tests, at Reynolds High School only about a third of sophomores earned high enough scores on all four state assessments to earn certificates this year. Reynolds is the only high school in the state that requires the certificate for graduation.

Administrators at Elgin High School in Eastern Oregon already know that at least two-thirds of their sophomore class didn't earn a certificate this year.

Several school districts aren't waiting to find out who earned certificates before reaching out to students who need academic assistance. Beaverton, for example, has invited students who didn't pass tests in reading, math multiple-choice and writing to attend summer school so they will be ready to retake the assessments and redo work samples as early as next fall.

This summer, the Salem-Keizer School District will hold a weeklong course for students who just missed earning a CIM or who scored below grade benchmarks. Students who didn't complete all their work samples will have a chance to finish them.

Salem-Keizer also will offer a course this summer and classes next fall for students who need help reaching standards.

Some students like the fact that the reform system allows them to pinpoint and work on trouble areas, such as grammar or problem-solving skills. Reviewing assignments in their portfolios shows them the progress they're making.

Wilson's Sanderman leaves school this week frustrated that he doesn't know whether he's earned the certificate. But if he hasn't, he's willing to work hard next year to meet the new standards.

"I like to pass whatever's thrown at me," he said. "I might as well do my best."

Staff writers Paige Parker, Wendy Lawton, Maya Blackmun and Richard Cockle contributed to this story.

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City & Local



School vouchers are in trouble

by *John M. Baer*
Daily News Staff Writer

HARRISBURG - Gov. Ridge and legislative leaders have a tenuous agreement on a watered-down school-voucher bill that would allow "super-vouchers" in Chester-Upland School District but delay vouchers in Philadelphia at least two to three years.

The measure is far from Ridge's goal of a statewide, five-year pilot plan or his attempt to bring immediate "academic recovery" to Philadelphia schools.

In addition, there are no guarantees it can pass.

It applies only to students now in public schools in the state's poorest-performing districts. And it includes a "local option" to allow individual school boards to decide whether to fund a local vouchers program.

The agreement shows the difficulty in marshaling support for vouchers but, according to legislative insiders, could be the only voucher bill acceptable to lawmakers preparing to adjourn for summer recess tomorrow.

House Majority Leader John Perzel, R-Philadelphia, said last night both he and Ridge wanted to include Philadelphia with Chester-Upland, but "there just aren't the votes" to do so.

In fact, when asked if the new, agree-to measure can pass the House, Perzel said, "I don't know about that either. . .we've got to count the heads."

Senate Majority Leader F. Joseph Loeper, R-Delaware County, said he thought there would be enough Senate votes to pass the measure, at least "by the time it gets here."

Votes are expected tonight and tomorrow.

Loeper downplayed the scaled-back nature of the bill, saying "the important thing is it's got a voucher component to it."

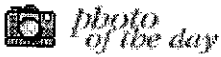
Under the proposal, Philadelphia and a handful of other school districts, likely to include Harrisburg and a few in Western Pennsylvania, would be targeted for "academic recovery."

Philadelphia and the other districts would go on a voucher clock giving them two full years of testing before a voucher option clicks in.

In Chester-Upland, which the state Department of Education says has the lowest standardized test scores of all 501 school districts and which already is under a state takeover order, public school students would have the option to take the state share of education funding - \$3,500 per student in that district - to attend any school they choose in September.

Chester-Upland has 7,657 students, about average size for school districts in Pennsylvania. Philadelphia has 213,000 students.

Ridge spokesman Tim Reeves would not discuss details of the agreement other than to say, "we are very close to achieving a breakthrough compromise" that can pass the Legislature.



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For starters, Ridge's Academic Recovery Act, which he released in February, will be the basis for the new bill - with several key changes.

The plan uses so-called "supervouchers" as part of a larger rescue package for academically ailing school districts. Parents could use the state's current per-pupil spending to receive between \$2,000 and \$4,000 to send their children to the public, private or religious school of their choice.

The districts would be outlined in the bill - there were eight in Ridge's plan - but the final list and the criteria are not yet set, sources said.

Perhaps the largest new provision in the bill would give elected school boards statewide the authority to create voucher programs even if they are not designated as academically distressed.

The provision would give state authority to districts to offer vouchers, but would likely not spell out the amount of the vouchers and other key details, sources said. Any school district that opts for vouchers would receive no additional state money for the program.

It was not immediately clear when the school-choice provisions would take effect.

The move is targeted at lawmakers who wanted vouchers in their districts, but who do not represent schools that are academically distressed. Delaware County is a prime example.

In interviews with 10 out of 11 Delaware County representatives, nine supported the concept of school choice and one opposed it. In interviews with three of four senators, two supported it and one opposed it.

The Delaware County delegation is a powerful group chock-full of legislative leaders and committee chairmen. Passing a voucher proposal that does not address their needs may have been difficult.

Reasons for support vary, but some pin it on the Catholic population. The county has nearly 20,000 students attending Catholic schools - about the same number per capita as Philadelphia.

Vouchers are a way for suburban lawmakers to hand these constituents a tax break, because many suburbanites already use private schools.

With the Recovery Act, troubled schools would be outlined in the bill. They would then be given tools to help turn things around. These tools range from hiring uncertified teachers to privatization of some services.

The districts would be asked to create recovery plans. The bill will likely include some money - perhaps about \$10 million - to create the plans. If results are seen in a district after two years, the district would be dropped from the list. If not, the state will take control of the district, and the vouchers would kick in.

The Recovery Act would not require new state money, education officials have said.

Ridge's other voucher proposal, a \$587 million, five-year pilot program of Educational Opportunity Grants ranging from \$350 to \$1,400, appears to be stalled.

If enacted, Pennsylvania would join about half the states in having passed academic recovery legislation.

And if the legislation passes - a big if, given several failures since 1995 - a court challenge is expected almost immediately.

Metropolitan Times

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 16, 1999

The Washington Times

SECTION C

Cover Story

Students prosper at year-round school

By Jabeen Bhalli
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Most Fairfax County youngsters have just a week left of public school classes. Then they'll be free for nearly three months of summer vacation.

But not all of them. Carrie Jo Cornwell and her classmates at Timber Lane Elementary School in Falls Church will toil away through next week. Then they'll be back at it on Aug. 2.

Timber Lane is a year-round school, the first of its kind in the Washington area. As the first year on the schedule draws to a close, school officials and parents are applauding the change because it lends continuity and less repetition to learning.

Students seem happy, too. Carrie Jo gets three other extended vacations during the school year to loaf, vacation or attend one of the school's camp-like enrichment courses.

"School is better than before," she said. "We get longer breaks when we need them and can try new things out over break time. I'd rather have this."

"It's much easier for the students," said Carla Fletcher, a fifth-grade teacher at Timber Lane. "They don't forget as much of the material as they did before. Because there is less regression, there are also less complaints about repetitive material. And because of the more frequent breaks, the kids are able to sustain working for longer periods of time."

"I want to keep it this way," said Carrie Jo's mother, Nancy Cornwell. "It gives the kids some time off when they need a breather and normally don't have it. It gives them an opportunity to try other activities. Both my kids liked it."

Timber Lane's school year began Aug. 3 and will end June 25. The school still operates on a 180-day school year, but the lost summer holidays are taken in breaks at the end of each quarter — two weeks each in October, January and April. Students still have Thanksgiving, Christmas and spring holidays.

During the three breaks, the school offers optional extra enrichment and remedial classes called intersessions. Eighty percent of the school's 560 students took the extra classes this year.

The intersessions emphasize hands-on learning. In one class, children learned fractions and other math skills through cooking. In a "pre-med" class, children learned about the human body by presentations complete with real hearts.

In another class taught by a military officer, they went to "boot camp" and learned discipline, motivation and how to sing the "Sound Off" song.

Jane Beddoe said her 8-year-



Timber Lane Elementary students Greg Hoggard, Mark McQuay, Chris Chan and Daniel Coleman concentrate in their silent reading period. Photo by Sean Dougherty/The Washington Times

old daughter, Annie, "is still talking about the heart they brought in" after the pre-med course. But she did more than talk, Ms. Beddoe recalled.

After the class, the third-grader voluntarily created a science project on the human senses. It won a prize in the school's science fair.

Although school officials say it is too soon to tell if the schedule change and the extra sessions have enhanced academic performance, teachers and parents offer anecdotal evidence suggesting it has.

"I have seen some improvement in math skills," Mrs. Fletcher said. "The supplemental classes offer skills that kids can carry back into the classroom."

School officials say the change also allows students to get help when they need it.

"We don't have to wait for summer school to get remedial help," said Donna Lewis, the school's principal. "We have got them right there and can get them help after every quarter."

The schedule change costs the county about \$150,000, mostly for transportation and salaries. The school charges students \$25

for each of the intersessions.

Some parents, critical of the schedule, say it disrupts families' schedules. The shorter summer vacation prevents youths from joining summer camps and other activities, some parents complain.

Rick Nelson, president of the Fairfax County Federation of Teachers calls the year-round approach "a step in the right direction. Giving students extra help more often rather than social promotion is the right approach to education."

Still, Mr. Nelson cautions county school administrators to avoid overburdening the school's regular teachers. The two-week classes were taught by six regular teachers and 14 volunteers, mostly part-time or retired teachers.

"We have concerns they can maintain the quality of the program they had this year and retain the staff they need without burning out the regular teachers," he said. "They need time to regroup."

Other area schools are considering the year-round schedule. Dogwood Elementary School in Reston plans to convert to the year-round schedule, beginning

In a "pre-med" class, children studied the body using real hearts.

in August 2000.

Nationwide, about 3,000 schools in 41 states follow this schedule. That's an almost six-fold increase this decade, according to the National Association for Year-Round Education in San Diego.

Although the majority of Timber Lane's parents supported the change and work around the schedule, four parents transferred their children to another school. Six others disapproved but kept their children in Timber Lane, said Ms. Lewis.

Jill Garnett opposed the year-round schedule but enrolled two of her children at Timber Lane anyway. During the past year, her oldest daughter followed a regular school calendar. As a result, Mrs. Garnett could only take her younger children — both of whom attend Timber Lane — to visit their grandparents in Michigan.

"This whole year has been screwy," she said. "We feel like our family is divided. And I didn't see anything this year that convinced me that it was worth it."

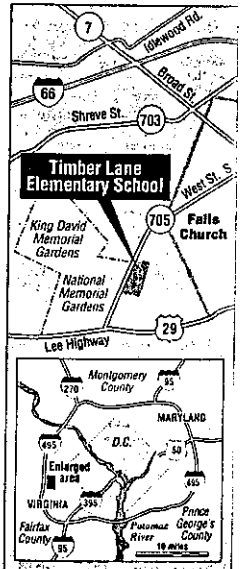
Because of the "disruptive" schedule, Mrs. Garnett has accelerated her family's relocation plans.

"They tell you that if you don't like it, you can leave," she said. "That is what we are doing. But it wasn't an easy decision. And it wasn't nice to be told that by your

school and your neighborhood." Twenty-four sets of parents put their children on Timber Lane's enrollment waiting list. Other parents reworked their schedules.

Ms. Beddoe said it wasn't difficult for her family to accommodate the schedule because of advance planning. She added that the benefits outweighed any inconvenience.

"We had talked about going to Disney World this year," she said. "Annie wanted to go. But she didn't want to miss the intersession."



YEAR-ROUND SCHOOL

Timber Lane Elementary School's first year-round schedule is winding down. Key dates in the students' schedules:

Aug. 3, 1998 — School began
Oct. 12-23 — Holidays/optional intersessions
Dec. 23-Jan. 1 — Christmas break
Jan. 4-15 — Holidays/optional intersessions
March 29-April 2 — Spring break
April 5-17 — Holidays/optional intersessions
June 25 — School ends, no intersessions during summer
Aug. 2 — School begins

Source: Timber Lane Elementary School calendar

The Washington Times

E D I T O R I A L S

Reinventing (Bad) Government

What happens when political exploitation turns into personal vengeance? Ask Vice President Al Gore. When a government employee objected to a Gore political event, he was fired.

Gore turned a nonpartisan Department of Education press conference into a campaign stop in February. The aftermath left one department employee without a job — and a bad taste in everybody else's mouth.

The incident took place in February when the National Center for Education Statistics released the reading score results for the National Assessment for Educational Progress.

Gore heard that the results showed slight improvement over 1994. Anxious to exploit the event, Gore announced the results, claiming the scores as evidence of the Clinton administration's successes in school reform.

"I am proud to report to you new evidence that our efforts are beginning to pay off," Gore said. "For the very first time, reading scores have improved for each of the three grades measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress, fourth grade, eighth grade and 12th grade. This is great progress, and we're proud to report it."

Gore didn't just take credit for the higher scores — he fudged the real story about them. Scores are up modestly over 1994. But fourth-grade scores showed no increase over 1992. Eighth-grade scores were up slightly over 1992 and 1994. And 12th-grade scores were up over 1994 but below those in 1992.

To put these numbers in context: 38% of fourth-graders, 26% of eighth-graders and 23% of 12th-graders scored below the most basic measure for reading at grade level in 1998 — hardly an endorsement of Washing-

this month. In other words, Forgione was fired, even though his boss, Education Department Secretary Richard Riley, urged his reappointment.

Late last month Congress held hearings on the "politicization" of the event.

"The vice president's participation was not an apolitical release of education data, but rather it seems as if this was an orchestrated media event to promote a political agenda," concluded Rep. Pete Hoekstra, R-Mich.

We'd have to agree. And Forgione's firing says something about Gore. One can only conclude he is vengeful and designing when crossed. Frankly, we've had enough of that with the last six years of sleaze.

Forgione and Musick deserve nothing but praise. We've remarked before that one reason the education status quo is so sick is that it's hard to tell what's going on. Accountability is a popular buzzword, but it's impossible to achieve as long as there isn't enough information.

The NAEP scores are a step in that direction. They are one of the few measures of student achievement that are unbiased. Before there can be education perestroika, we need glasnost — a free flow of information.

Forgione and Musick are working toward that end.

Gore's move should call into question the current trend toward greater federal involvement in education.

The founders dedicated themselves to the principle of limited government to restrain politically self-serving officials. The founders did not want America to place politics before truth or personal liberty.

The firing of Forgione shows (yet again) this administration is willing to put political expedience over truth, duty and a man's honorable service. This is not the way to improve education or reinvent government.

Strong Upward Trend?

Gore claimed reading scores were up in 1998, but not when compared to 1992

	1992	1994	1998
Grade 12	292	287	291
Grade 8	260	260	264
Grade 4	217	214	217

Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress

ton's involvement.

Gore didn't just play games with the truth — he also broke the law. Gore used the event to claim success for the Clinton administration and to rally for more funds for his favorite education programs such as Head Start and Even Start, computers in the classroom, 100,000 new teachers and AmeriCorps.

But like many other agencies, Congress has passed a law to keep NAEP releases apolitical.

Pascal Forgione, head of the NCES, and Mark Musick, chairman of the National Assessment Governing Board, were quick to see Gore's move for what it was.

"We believe that the format, tone and substance of that event was not consistent with the principle of an independent, nonpartisan release of National Assessment data," Musick wrote Forgione. "It eventually won't matter how much attention is paid to the results; people won't believe."

When this letter leaked to the media, Forgione soon found out that his appointment would not be renewed



The Salt Lake Tribune

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Tuesday, June 15, 1999

Teachers' Union Meeting Rattles With Displeasure

BY HEATHER MAY, THE SALT
LAKE TRIBUNE

Utah Education Association President Phyllis Sorensen had some fighting words for Utah legislators Monday, and they all started with the letter "S."

In the teachers' union's first-ever "State of the Schools" address to UEA members, Sorensen said the Legislature's record is dismal.

What has changed is what educators are going to do about it.

Sorensen promised the UEA will no longer simply complain about a shrinking public education budget, growing class sizes and low pay. Now they are talking about a statewide strike that would be the first disruption of classes since 1989, when Utah teachers staged a one-day walkout to protest meager funding.

"We've seen policy-makers do everything in their power to destroy public schools," said Sorensen. "The UEA and its 19,000-plus members won't stand idly by while education erodes further. . . . We will fight with every ounce of energy we have."

Sorensen spoke at the UEA's annual leadership conference at the Quality Inn in Salt Lake City. She had the usual laundry list of complaints, saying teachers are frustrated at the state's per-pupil expenditure (the lowest in the nation), the large class sizes and the low salary (Utah teachers rank 38th in the nation, according to UEA numbers).

Sorensen tiptoed around the idea of a strike throughout her speech, but it was in the air.

"Strapped, struggling and other s-words might better describe our schools," she said, adding that legislators would hear more s-words like "SOS -- Save Our Schools" -- if they didn't give more money. This year lawmakers gave a 2.5 percent increase for public education, the lowest in years.

In a news conference after her speech, Sorensen finally mentioned "strike," saying it was an option.

"That's one of the harshest things we can do. . . . teachers want to be in the classroom," she said, adding, "We aren't taking anything off the list of options."

Sorensen said a task force called the Strategic Tactical Action Resource Team (START) will decide if and when to strike. The group will be made of UEA members and members of local education associations.

Teachers would likely walk out if they don't see a satisfactory public education budget, Sorensen predicted.

"We'll look at budgets and the priorities the state has. . . . If those aren't achieved there will be consequences," she warned.

It was in September 1989 that the UEA staged a one-day walkout, upset that legislators approved a tax reduction without allocating money for education. Michael McCoy, UEA attorney, remembers the catalyst was Gov. Norm Bangerter's advice that the teachers "go home and take two aspirin."

"The unsettled state of affairs is increasing again," he said. "There are a lot of teachers who are talking about some kind of job action. There are a lot of school administrators who are saying, 'Why don't you teachers do something?'"

At least one legislator thinks a strike would not work. Sen. Howard Stephenson, R-Draper, who co-chairs the Public Education Appropriations Committee, said he has heard similar threats. A proponent of school vouchers and tuition tax credits and a periodic critic of public education, he predicts a strike would backfire.

"If the teachers strike it would hurt their cause more than help it because of the frustration that parents are feeling in their inability to take charge of their own children's education and to hold teachers accountable," said Stephenson, who also is chair of a state task force on education standards and accountability.

He said the 2000 Legislature might find more money for public education, but it would have to be accompanied by "accountability and the ability to get rid of poor teachers and greater choice by parents in directing their children's educational program."

Stephenson is also president of the fiscally conservative Utah Taxpayers Association (UTA), which recently praised the state for giving teachers a competitive wage. Using state figures, the UTA reported that the average salary for Utah teachers is \$43,557 with benefits, placing Utah third in an eight-state region.

In her speech, Sorensen criticized that report and Stephenson, accusing him of using UTA as a



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"bully pulpit for his anti-schools agenda."

Striking would be the last step in a larger UEA plan. Sorensen said teachers will likely start off by ending a long practice of buying school supplies out of their pocket and spending countless unpaid hours on schoolwork.

The UEA, which wants teachers to be more outspoken, also has begun training its members on how to tell the public why they and public education need more money. The UEA is forming a speakers bureau and building partnerships with businesses in the hopes of building public support to better influence policy-makers.

The UEA may have some hope of that working. Washington state's teachers' union, the Washington Education Association, this year asked its legislators for a 15 percent increase in teacher salaries over two years, according to WEA spokesman Rich Wood. The WEA wanted to make up for the money teachers lost to inflation and to keep teachers from quitting to go to better-paying jobs in industry and in school districts in other states.

The 67,000-member union had a media campaign, staged one-day walkouts and rallies to convince the public they needed better salaries to improve education.

The WEA secured an average raise of 3 percent a year. New teachers got a 6 percent a year raise.

"This issue was the dominant issue" in the Legislature, Wood said of the pay hike. "There was a lot of frustration out there and a lot of passion."



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McCain spells out education platform

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By NICOLE ZIEGLER DIZON

CHICAGO (June 15, 1999 12:34 a.m. EDT <http://www.nandotimes.com>) - Republican presidential candidate John McCain promoted an education platform Monday of merit-based pay for teachers, a nationwide school voucher program and high-speed Internet access for every school.

McCain, a three-term senator from Arizona, switched gears to domestic policy after spending weeks as the voice for quicker, more decisive action in Kosovo.

During a luncheon speech at the National Cable and Television Association's cable '99 convention, McCain called the Internet a powerful educational tool. But he warned that it also can serve as a refuge for alienated children.

"The good news is that the Internet can expose young people to subjects that increase their intellectual maturity so that they can advance apace with their potential," he said. "The bad news is that it can expose children to material that overwhelms their emotional maturity."

He suggested requiring filtering software for all public school and library computers as a way to keep children from potentially harmful Internet sites. Critics have said such proposals are useless because the software becomes outdated so quickly.

McCain also called for a school voucher program that would give tax money to middle- and lower-income families to send their children to private schools. And he praised charter schools -- publicly funded schools that often serve a specialized curriculum and operate free from many government mandates.

McCain promoted merit-based pay for teachers, calling higher teacher salaries an "urgent necessity." But he added that teachers should be tested for competence periodically and fired if they don't meet certain standards.

"Some people just aren't meant to be teachers, and we should help them find another line of work," McCain said.

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Chicago Sun-Times

online News

A million miles from Monday.

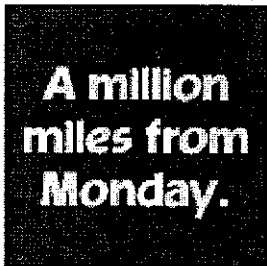
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McCain calls for school innovation

June 15, 1999

BY CHARLES NICODEMUS STAFF REPORTER

With digs at Republicans and Democrats alike, GOP maverick Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) Monday unveiled a mostly conservative, sometimes progressive national education proposal for his fledgling presidential campaign.

The Vietnam war hero told the cable TV industry's annual convention here that high-tech Internet instruction is the wave of the future, but "the kitchen table" at home remains the most important teaching site.

McCain, who often bucks his party leaders on issues ranging from campaign finance reform to foreign policy, said, "Republicans have to acknowledge there is a role for the federal government" in education.

But the role is to act as a "clearinghouse" to tell the states "what's working and what's not" in educational programs across the nation, he said.

McCain also noted that "Republicans have opposed innovative ways to support school districts in desperate straits," and that should change.

On the other hand, "Democrats continually refuse to accept that competition breeds excellence." That competition should come, he said, from greater numbers of charter schools "and a broad national test of school vouchers" to give parents a choice for their children's education.

"Republicans also should recognize the urgent necessity of paying teacher salaries commensurate with the invaluable service they provide," McCain said.

But Democrats "must agree pay should be merit-based" and that periodic, locally run competency tests are needed "to weed out problem teachers."

There should be federal dollars for education, he said--a concept many Republicans disdain--but McCain said 90 cents out of every federal educational dollar should be spent in ways "local educators . . . can best prioritize."

Borrowing from GOP progressive Theodore Roosevelt, he said the nation needs "a federal bully pulpit to encourage states and cities to improve standards."

McCain heads the powerful Senate Commerce Committee, which handles legislation affecting the burgeoning cable TV industry. He told the cable executives and owners, meeting at McCormick Place, that he wants every school hooked up to the Internet.

He also wants "every school and library" Internet connection to be equipped with software "filters" that will screen out "inappropriate," objectionable material.

[Back to News Seven-day Archive Page](#)



Hello and welcome to the Center for Education Reform's weekly hot-line, this week beginning June 11.

A decision from Vermont's supreme court on school choice demonstrates how uneven the judgment of judges can be. While in Ohio judges there found the program constitutional in Vermont parents weren't so lucky. The court there ruled that religious schools will not be among the choices Vermont parents can have. In deed a decision that may force the hand of the US Supreme Court.

Meanwhile back in Ohio legislators there are working to fix the Cleveland school choice program which was ruled invalid by the courts on a technicality.

In Pennsylvania, Governor Ridge held a massive choice rally at the state capitol in Harrisburg. The rally brought together 2000 parents, children, and even two busloads of union teamsters who support school choice. Legislative action on Ridge's educational opportunity grant program and the academic recovery act is expected next week.

On the Charter School front - with the ink barely dry on Oregon's new charter laws, The Renaissance School in Eagle Point Oregon was approved at the school board meeting June 9, kudos to Shannon Sanders, the Director and a teacher, for her efforts.

Californians are rallying against a sneak attack by those against charter schools. The legislature has before it a state budget bill that will close down over 30 charter schools and severely harm 20 schools that use non-classroom based instructional methods. Over 19,000 students and families would be denied the educational program they believe works best if the bill passes.

And finally our school of the week award goes to a Inglewood Unified School District elementary school, Kelso elementary school. It has earned the distinction of being one of California's more successful high-poverty schools. With 78% of the student body qualifying for the free-or reduced priced lunch program, and a make-up of 48% Hispanic and 51% black, this district school is beating the odds using the "Open Court" curriculum method. On last years statewide achievement tests Kelso students, with the exception of the third graders, beat the national average, with some classes scoring in the top 20% of the national comparison groups.

Thanks for calling the Center for Education Reform's hot-line, for further information please call the center direct at 800-521-2118. Have a great week!

Subject: FW: PA choice stuff

Date: Fri, 11 Jun 1999 10:39:48 -0500

From: "~~Dave DeSchryver~~" <dave@edreform.com>

To: rcoblyn@ix.netcom.com

From: "Dave DeSchryver" <dave@edreform.com>

To: robin@edreform.com

Subject: PA choice stuff

Date: Fri, Jun 11, 1999, 9:35 AM

Everybody in Harrisburg PA, from Members to staffers to reporters - has been talking about Governor Ridge's two education reform proposals, the Educational Opportunity Grant program and the Academic Recovery Act. On June 7th, the Governor held a massive school choice rally at the state capitol. The rally that brought together somewhere between 1,500 and 2,000 parents, children, and even 2 buses of union Teamsters in support of school choice. Legislative action on a pilot school choice program is expected next week.

2542439

Subject: FW: Sacramento Rally - June 21

Date: Fri, 11 Jun 1999 10:39:56 -0500

From: "Dave DeSchryver" <dave@edreform.com>

To: rcoblyn@ix.netcom.com

From: "Dave DeSchryver" <dave@edreform.com>
To: robin@edreform.com
Subject: FW: Sacramento Rally - June 21
Date: Fri, Jun 11, 1999, 9:41 AM

May want to mention this as well...

From: listserv@canec.org
To: dave@edreform.com
Subject: Sacramento Rally - June 21
Date: Fri, Jun 11, 1999, 3:01 AM

--CANEC Listserv Announcement--

STOP the legislature from closing more than 30 charter schools!

STOP the legislature from shortchanging every charter school student!

Come show your support at the
CHARTER SCHOOLS

RALLY II

MONDAY, JUNE 21!

Front steps of the Capitol (west entrance) at 11:45 a.m.
(participants can begin to assemble at 11 a.m.)

MANY SCHOOLS ARE CLOSING FOR THE SUMMER. PLEASE GET THE WORD OUT TO YOUR
PARENTS NOW!

The massive attack by the anti-charter school members of the legislature is continuing. This time it is a sneak attack through the State Budget process. We must tell every Senator, Assembly member and the Governor that this is WRONG!

The legislature has before it a proposal that will close down over 30 charter schools and severely harm 20 schools that use non-classroom based instructional methods. Over 19,000 student and families would be denied the educational program they believe works best.

The same budget proposal will shortchange funding to every charter school student by hundreds of dollars.

Our first rally last month MADE A DIFFERENCE on the collective bargaining issue. Now we need to do it again with another strong showing of support from charter school parents, teachers, students and supporters!

If you missed the first rally, here is your chance to show your support for charter schools. If you were at the first rally, PLEASE come back! The issues charters schools are facing in Sacramento today are potentially even more devastating than the collective bargaining legislation that we fought so hard last month.

Bring homemade signs!

Signs can not be any larger than 30x30 inches. They have to have a wooden handle. No other handle will be permitted. The handle can not be larger than 1/2 inch thick by 1 inch wide and can not have a point on the end. On the sign try to include the city/school name of the participant so it is clear that people have come from all over the state.

Wear School T-Shirts!

If your school has t-shirts please have rally participants wear them. A limited number of rally t-shirts will be distributed at the rally. CANEC will be asking for a \$5 donation for the t-shirts to help cover the costs of the rally.

The rally colors are red, white and blue.

Capitol Park restrictions rally participants should be aware of:

- Banners, bunting, etc. shall not be hung nor tacked to trees, shrubbery, fencing or lamp posts on State property.
- Commercial activities are prohibited on State property.
- Leaf letting without a permit is permissible if only one person is engaged and the leaflets are not commercial in nature.
- There will be a CANEC monitor assigned to every 50 people participating in the rally. This is a requirement of the CHP Permit Office. The monitor will be identified by a name badge. If a monitor gives you instructions please respond accordingly.

Wear sun screen and hats!

The rally is in a very sunny area. This time of year it can be very hot. We also suggest that rally participants bring water.

Please FAX the information requested below to CANEC @ 650 654-4267 or e-mail to gocanec@aol.com by Friday, June 18. Additional information will be available at the rally about visiting legislators. For more information contact CANEC at 650 654-6003.

Yes! Our school/organization will be there!

Name of school/organization: _____
How many attending rally: _____
Contact person: _____
Phone #: _____

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

-- If you would like to be removed from this list, you may reply to this message or send e-mail to CANECTIONS@aol.com --

The New L.A. Law

Los Angeles Mayor Richard Riordan has just proven you not only can fight City Hall, you can change it. On Tuesday he won 60% voter approval for a new charter that gives the city's traditionally weak mayor the right to hire and fire all managers and impose accountability on city departments. In addition, Mayor Riordan now has a working majority on the city's school board, which will look favorably on needed reforms.

Mayor Riordan put both capital and sweat equity into his campaign to shake up the city.

"This is the most important election in city history," he would tell voters. He also helped raise some \$2 million for his slate of school-board candidates, including \$270,000 of his own money. Three of his candidates won

easily, and the fourth, Genothia Hayes, won a runoff election this week. Ms. Hayes, director of the local Southern Christian Leadership Conference, was opposed by almost the entire black power structure. Rep. Maxine Waters and Supervisor Yvonne Burke did commercials for her incumbent opponent. Los Angeles's voters decided this week it was time for a big change. This result also strongly suggests that inner-city parents don't behave in politically conventional ways when the issue is their kids' education.

After this election, the Los Angeles school board will now no longer be



Richard Riordan

dominated by the teachers' union, which too often holds the terms of its contract far above the educational future of students. The state Department of Education reported this week that in Los Angeles only 53% of high school freshmen end up with a diploma. School board member David Tokofsky, a Riordan ally, says "the system is replete with social promotion" that pushes failing students into higher grades where they can't do the required work. The state report noted that the graduation rate for all California students is only 67% and hasn't budged after 10 years of higher spending on schools.

The mayor's new influence is a reward from voters who approve of his success in lowering the crime rate, promoting economic development and convincing corporations to become involved in civic renewal. But he is still hemmed in by the forces of political correctness. City employee unions tacked on ludicrous items to the new charter, including a "living wage" provision that requires city contractors to pay 50% more than the minimum wage. The teachers union will continue to oppose more charter schools and accountability for classroom results.

Nonetheless, Mayor Riordan can take satisfaction at the progress he's made. Along with others in the current generation of innovative mayors, such as Rudy Giuliani of New York, Michael White of Cleveland, John Norquist of Milwaukee and Bret Schundler of Jersey City, he has proven false the cliché that America's cities have their future behind them.

WALL STREET JOURNAL

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31/AWO ***

THURSDAY, JUNE 10, 1999

INTERNET ADDRESS: <http://wsj.com>

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REVIEW & OUTLOOK

Blaming the SATs

Just what do the SATs have to do with civil rights? Reasonable people may well wonder. The U.S. Education Department's Office for Civil Rights has an answer, set forth in proposed new guidelines intended to lower the boom on the standardized education tests long employed by college and university admissions offices.

The use of tests that have what the guidelines call "significant disparate impact" on members of any particular race, national origin or sex is discriminatory, according to the Office for Civil Rights. Therefore, the OCR advises, universities and colleges should use what this document delicately describes as "alternative criteria." Which means, in plain English, criteria more concerned with the goals of minority and gender preference than with measuring abilities in reading, writing, thinking, basic English and other elementary skills still required for success in most colleges and universities, and the world beyond.

College and university officials not surprisingly received news of the federal guidelines with confusion and dismay. The plain fact of the matter is, as they told a reporter for *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, the standardized tests are essential, there being no other single, reliable way to compare all applicants. Nor do educators know the exact legal consequences for schools that run afoul of the new policy.

There should be no doubt, however, about the threat implicit in the comments of Arthur Coleman, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights. "To the extent that schools are recipients of federal funds and are not aware of potential discrimination issues, we hope this guide will inform them." Not aware? College admissions administrators will certainly get the message—not only the part about federal funds, but about the federal lawsuits that could come the way of any institution judged guilty of excessive interest in SAT scores.

All this is more than a little interesting, coming as it does at a time when there is no longer any pretense about the disastrous decline in education, particularly in inner-city high schools, as is made clear in the Los Angeles vote discussed in the editorial below. Indeed, there can no longer be any doubt that for three decades now, minority children have been given precious little by way of serious education. Instead the system held in place by the entrenched political establish-

ment has mainly produced academic failure, discouragement and mass dropouts. So now the Clinton Administration proposes to force colleges to bear the brunt of the disastrous SAT scores coming out of these schools.

Understandably, the Democratic-liberal coterie in charge of our elites' schools are reluctant to concede the education disaster they helped visit on those they were supposed to school. It is an issue at the heart of the struggles now going on between New York City's Mayor, Rudolph Giuliani, and his school Chancellor—and, no less, at the core of the bitter battle involving the City University of New York, recipient of vast numbers of unprepared and undereducated products of the city's high schools.

As Herman Badillo, newly appointed chairman of CUNY and ardent advocate of seriously toughened education standards in the high schools has long maintained, the University should not have to be in the business of teaching its students basic reading, writing and English.

All this—the now incontestable proof of the non-education going on in the country's urban schools—suggests one reason we are now hearing about inequity in college admissions. A war on the SATs would be, for the Office for Civil Rights, a subject far more appealing, and a handy diversion from hard facts.

As to the SATs themselves, a bane for most high school students, the truth is they are highly accurate predictors of college performance, of who is and isn't likely to graduate. They were also designed, as a study by Washington attorney Lenora Ostrowsky notes in the publication *Academic Question*—to "see through" inferior education and the results of poverty, to discover cognitive ability and uncover talent. This they have done the past 75 years.

As to the role of classrooms in all this, a recent study of college performance by Clifford Adelman concluded that the greatest predictor of college success is the rigor of the student's high school curriculum. The greater the academic intensity in high school, in short, the higher the likelihood of success in college.

A focus on matters like academic intensity and a rigorous high school curriculum is eminent common sense. The sort of thing a Department of Education might have spent its time worrying about, in better days.

Subject: FW: Sharing Celebrations!

Date: Thu, 10 Jun 1999 11:09:32 -0500

From: "Dave DeSchryver" <dave@edreform.com>

To: Robert Funk <Robert@edreform.com>

'
Cathy McKenna <cathy@edreform.com>
, robin@edreform.com
Mime-version: 1.0
X-Priority: 3
Content-type: text/plain; charset="US-ASCII"
Content-transfer-encoding: 7bit
Message-Id: <19990610111200.1f0115e5.in@mail.synergration.com>

Here is a good outreach project. Welcome them to the team. Who would do this (drop them a letter w/ PP and the like)?

D

From: sanders <sanders@CDSNET.NET>
To: CHARTERSCHOOLS@LISTSERV.SYR.EDU
Subject: Sharing Celebrations!
Date: Thu, Jun 10, 1999, 8:32 AM

We are please to announce that the "Charter" for The Renaissance School in Eagle Point Oregon was approved at the school board meeting last night. Though this is our second year, I think we might be the first official charter in Oregon !

Shannon Sanders
Director/Teacher

June 8, 1999

To: Jeanne
Robin
Et al.
From: Cara
Subject: Status of the target states

- Maine: No real action, possible bill tabled for next year, parent conference?
- Maryland: Bill killed, trying to coordinate something with Joni Gardner
- Nebraska: Bill didn't advance, Rhonda & co. hard at work for next year, parent conference
- Oklahoma: We won! Coordinate a conference with Sandy Garrett
- Oregon: We won! Jeanne speaking at July events. Coordinating with folks on the ground.
- Tennessee: Deader than a doornail. Not sure how much to do there.
- Washington: Nothing really started this year. Do we want to try to start something for next year?

From: "gayle cloud" <cloud9@pe.net>
Reply-To: cloud9@pe.net
To: p@victoria.pe.net
Date: Tue, Jun 8, 1999, 3:02 AM
Subject: (Fwd) A school that works - Kelso

----- Forwarded Message Follows -----
Date: Tue, 08 Jun 1999 20:48:40 -0500
To: The Loop
From: Gayle FYI It's OPEN Court again!!!!
Subject: A school that works - Kelso

Subject: Time: 12:49
PM OFFICE MEMO A school that works - Kelso Date: 6/8/99

Here is a school that is closing the achievement gap.

See the bottom for the data. It is clear from these data that as well as Kelso does with Open Court and reading, they do even better, comparatively with math.

Mike McKeown
Mathematically Correct

<http://www.mercurycenter.com/premium/front/docs/kelso07.htm>

Published Monday, June 7, 1999, in the San Jose Mercury News

Low-income school stresses basics to produce above-average students

BY MICHAEL BAZELEY Mercury News Staff Writer

INGLEWOOD -- The reading drills in Nicole Palmer's class begin just minutes after the morning bell.

``Buh, buh, buh,`` they practice in unison. `Uh, uh, uh. Mmm, Mmm, Mmm. Puh, puh, puh. B-U-M-P. Bump.``

And so it goes for the next three hours, one lesson quick on the heels of another. To the teachers at Kelso Elementary in the Inglewood Unified School District, such mental workouts are one reason the poor and minority school is beating the odds.

Pull back the curtain at one of California's more successful high-poverty schools, and you'll find poor kids doing as well as their more-affluent peers. By combining a no-frills commitment to academics, safety nets for students and a stubborn refusal to accept failure, Kelso regularly scores above state and national averages on standardized tests.

That unusual success rate has lured dozens of educators, politicians and

others to the school, all of them searching for ways to break the long-recognized link between poverty and low test scores.

``It's no excuses here,`` said Kelso reading coach Shelly Brower. ``You can't say, `Oh we're in a low socioeconomic neighborhood.` Our school is falling down like everyone else's. Too many people are allowed to make excuses. `Can't` is never said here. It's `can` and how will we do it.``

By almost any measure, Kelso is not a school that would be expected to excel. More than 50 percent of its students are from families on welfare, according to State Department of Education statistics. And nearly half come from homes where English is not the primary language. One teacher guessed that fewer than 3 percent of students attended pre-school.

The campus itself hardly inspires confidence. Yellow exterior paint is dulled and peeling from years of exposure. And in some classrooms, faded gray carpet is worn from the shuffling of thousands of little feet.

Although few at the school seem to notice, the low-flying jumbo jets that roar overhead every 10 minutes are a persistent reminder of Kelso's place in the gritty urban landscape.

The three R's

Focus on academics and test scores

Still, seemingly out of sheer will power, teachers and longtime Principal Marjorie Thompson, 72, have created a school where academics come first, second and third, and good test scores are the norm.

Much of the success can be attributed to Kelso's focus on test scores. Thompson and her staff closely monitor student performance on standardized exams, adjusting staffing or curriculum as needed. It's an approach that will serve the school well as the state begins placing a heavier emphasis on test scores.

Teachers say the backbone of Kelso's program is its reading and writing instruction. Known as Open Court, the program combines literature with a systematic, phonics-based approach to literacy.

For up to three hours each morning, students run through their reading drills and practice decoding words or writing. Every teacher follows an Open Court script that details what lessons to use each day.

Students are tested often. And teachers are monitored closely by Brower, the school's reading coach, who makes sure they are on pace with the right lessons.

Compared with other programs, the lessons require teachers to spend a lot of time in front of the class.

``You are exhausted at the end of the day because you are on all the time,`` Brower said. ``But the kids don't have any down time. . . . I love it.``

Eager students

Teachers wedded to tight script

Students appear to enjoy it also. During Valerie Jean Morton's morning drills, her 21 kindergarten students noisily compete with each other to shout out the correct answers to her questions. Even as Morton pauses to review the teacher's guide, her students continue to sound out words on the board.

Still, the heavily scripted Open Court is a shock for teachers accustomed to having more control over their lesson plans.

"I pride myself on my creativity, and it was hard having someone tell me what to do," said kindergarten teacher Tracey Simpson, 29. "But the results have been amazing."

Indeed, on last year's statewide achievement test, Kelso students did well. Second-graders scored at the 60th percentile in reading. Third-graders lagged behind the 50th percentile, but all other grades beat the national average. Some classes scored among the top 20 percent of the national comparison group.

Some educators criticize Open Court as too heavily favoring drill assignments that teach kids how to read, but not how to understand what they are reading. But Thompson disputes that, saying Open Court is a better-balanced reading program than Kelso's old repetitive phonics program.

The success of Open Court has given Kelso teachers a decidedly upbeat outlook on the potential of disadvantaged students. They are undaunted by research showing that poverty is one of the biggest predictors of low student achievement. And they deride those who are skeptical of the school's mission.

"Why would you think you couldn't teach a child?" Brower said. "I have never met a kid who couldn't read. Every kid can learn."

Thompson frowns just thinking about the job candidates who talk of coddling disadvantaged students.

"If I get any of this nonsense about minorities and low expectations or the problems with the kids' families," Thompson said, "I continue with the job interview, but I don't hire them. If you have low expectations, that's what you get."

Still, it would be impossible to ignore the challenges that low-income students bring to the classroom.

Fifth-grade teacher Mita Bhattacharaya said she often finds it hard to communicate with parents because their phones have been cut off or they move around a lot.

"But the biggest problem I face is the parents who really want to help, but they have no idea what is going on because of their educational

background," said Bhattacharaya, 25. Of the 32 students in her class, half of their parents either did not finish high school or have just a high school diploma.

"I can't always rely on the help at home, so the pressure falls back on me," she said.

While Open Court is the cornerstone of Kelso's approach, Thompson and her staff also have woven a safety net of programs to help keep students from failing.

For kindergartners with reading problems, the school tacks on an extra hour of specialized instruction -- either in small groups or one-on-one -- to their normal day.

After the first year, kindergarten students who still are not at grade level are held back and placed in a "pre-first grade" class, where they get a first-grade curriculum, but at a slightly slower pace.

Thompson expresses no qualms about holding students back, a practice increasingly frowned upon by educators as ineffective and socially harmful.

But Thompson said Kelso is getting more students with weak reading skills or students "who just haven't been taught" at other schools. "It's better to fail them once than to fail them every day," she says.

For older students, Kelso offers catch-up classes during the school's several "intersession" breaks. Because Kelso is a year-round school, its vacation time is divided up into three- and four-week breaks throughout the year. To Thompson, that time is a golden opportunity to give underachieving children the extra instruction they need.

Although the monthlong classes are strictly voluntary, most students surrender their vacation time if a teacher suggests it. Those who don't get a personal call at home from Thompson.

"You can get your education and learn stuff and you don't get into trouble," said 10-year-old Carrie Williams, who had no regrets about missing a recent vacation break. "It's fun, you can learn a lot."

Despite its high concentration of Spanish-speaking students, Kelso has never had a bilingual education program. Parents rejected it the one time it was proposed, and the school staff has never been impressed by bilingual education's track record at other schools.

Culture shock

() UCLA teachers seem ill at ease

But the Kelso way is not for everyone. In fact, this year half a dozen

new

teachers -- all from the teacher education program at the University of California-Los Angeles -- are chafing under Kelso's highly structured approach.

One teacher left midyear, and most of the other UCLA grads are expected to move on to other schools next year. The new teachers say their discontent reflects a larger chasm in educational circles over how to teach low-income and minority children.

Heather Moore, one of the UCLA grads, said she feels the teacher-centered approach Kelso favors is discriminatory because it deprives poor students of the more enriching academic activities students take for granted in wealthier schools.

``Kids in Inglewood can do the exact same things that kids in Beverly Hills can do,'' said Moore, 25, ``and just because they're here and just because they're not white doesn't mean they shouldn't be exposed to group work, they shouldn't be exposed to community learning or to making choices on their own, to all kinds of experiences that kids in Beverly Hills get all the time.''

The rift is so deep, Kelso has severed its partnership with UCLA, and Thompson wrings her hands over the damage the young teachers may have done to the school's overall performance.

Despite the conflict, though, teachers are nearly unanimous in their praise for Thompson.

Her philosophy is simple -- teachers are there to teach and students are there to learn -- and anything that interferes with that is not tolerated. This is not a school that is big on rallies or other extracurricular activities.

In fact, Thompson worries constantly about quality control. Although it's old and tired-looking, the school is kept spotless. And, Thompson spends much of her time observing new teachers, making sure they meet her standards and understand the Kelso way.

``She has 12 new teachers this year, and she's in their classroom a lot,`` said Jose Ponce, 25. ``My first year here last year was really tough and she was in there an awful lot just to see if I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing. And if what I was doing didn't work, she was really blunt about it. It took a lot for me to come back (this year). Because she has no room for pride.''

Despite her reputation as a taskmaster, Thompson is not an iron-fisted ruler. In fact, veteran teachers say she is the most supportive principal they have worked under.

Thompson believes principals should eliminate as many distractions as possible so teachers can stay focused on teaching. She will often race

down

to classrooms to remove disruptive students, intervene when parents have complaints or questions, or take over teaching a class if a teacher is ill.

Thompson spent nearly an entire morning recently teaching an intersession class of fourth-graders.

``The teacher is the No. 1 person behind the child,'' Thompson said. ``We're just here to support the teacher, and if we can't do that, we should just bow out.''

Thompson insists on knowing each child on campus. When they enroll, all new students pay a visit to the round table in Thompson's office, so they can be interviewed and tested on their skill levels. Thompson then personally decides where to place each student.

How long Kelso can maintain its enviable performance is anybody's guess. But more than one teacher is worried about the prospect of Thompson retiring soon.

``I and another teacher actually left here several years back and went to another school for a year,'' Brower said. ``We were miserable. All the principal cared about was whether the class bulletin boards matched the school colors. That would never happen here.''

Contact Michael Bazeley at mbaze

ley@sjmercury.com or (408) 920-5628.

Previous coverage:

www.mercurycenter.com/local/education/docs/poverty060699.htm

Kelso Elementary
Inglewood, CA

Demographic data from the Ed Data web site <<http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us/>> 1998 STAR(SAT-9) scores can be obtained from the link on the Ed Data site.

Numbers in parentheses represent the difference between scores at Kelso and predicted scores for schools of similar levels of subsidized lunch and LEP, based on a regression analysis of the scores and demographic data of 112 elementary schools in San Diego. See <<http://www.mathematicallycorrect.com/grade3.gif>> for a plot from this data set for third grade.

Free/Reduced Price Lunch 78%

LEP 40%

Hispanic 48%

Black 51%

White+Asian 1 %

STAR Scores

%ile (amount above predicted)

GRADE 2 3 4 5

Reading 60 (+24) 45 (+12) 53 (+19) 54 (+19)

Math 60 (+17) 66 (+25) 64 (+28) 67 (+28)

By comparison, the four Beverly Hills elementary schools, held up as models of higher order thinking and group work by the UCLA teacher-in-training, score very close to those scores predicted solely by their demographics. With few scores substantially better than expected, and an approximately equal number of scores below expectations.