

1001 Connecticut Avenue, NW  
Suite 204 • Washington, DC 20036

Tel 202-822-9000  
Fax 202-822-5077

# HOT-LINE

MARCH

# 1999

#3 Hotline 3/31

Florida sizzled late last week with passage by the House of Representatives on a bill to permit true choice among students trapped in failing schools. Governor Jeb Bush's A-PLUS package now progresses to the Senate. The package would dramatically improve public schools by rewarding successful schools and moving in to change failing schools. And children in failing schools would have an option to go to their public or private school of choice.

Perhaps more than any other single statement of the day, Democratic Representative Beryl Roberts said it best. Roberts, an African-American from Miami said:

"I have heard (from colleagues in opposition to the choice program) that it is fundamentally unfair for us to give public dollars to a private institution," Roberts said. "I want to tell you what's fundamentally unfair - for parents to spend tax dollars to send their children to schools for long hours to only find they cannot read and they cannot write."

Roberts deserves applause, as do some judges up the coast in New Jersey, who just ruled that lawsuits pending against three charter schools were unfounded. The New Jersey school boards association, threatened by the existence of several suburban charter schools, launched a series of lawsuits shortly after they were formed. BUT THE COURTS thus far have held that charter schools are public schools, are valid forms of education, and rebuffed the assaults by the school boards. More such decisions regarding other schools are soon expected.

And finally, we direct you to the terrific work this week of Vermonters for School Choice, a "revolutionary" group of active citizens wanting to bring more quality education options to their community. They are organizing a conference, with the Center for Education Reform to educate Vermonters about the 110 year-old tradition of choice. Call Libby for information at 802-773-3740.

CER Hotline #2 Week of March 17, 1999

The National PTA, which portrays itself as an organization that supports parents, has shown again that this old reputation is not well deserved.

While millions of parents' clamor for reform and choice from growing problems in today's schools, the National PTA argues that parents actually want more federal involvement in schooling. Not so, according to CER analyses. Questions in a survey of parents the National PTA conducted actually are very misleading, and the answers don't match the conclusions well. Look for more details in CER's March Monthly Letter to Friends, due on our Web site and in mail boxes soon.

The one thing we know for a fact about parents is that they want options, and they want strong schools. That's why this week, three states made great strides in helping those most in need to get their ticket out of failing schools.

Texans have filed Senate Bill 10--which will help up to 143,000 disadvantaged children. Florida's effort to put failing schools on notice and give poor children a leg up is being hotly debated right now. Arizona's House of Representatives just voted to create a pilot program extending their now famous public school choice options to private school.

And despite the clamor by the public, of which over 70% support these various plans, the two Rudys in New York city — the mayor and the chancellor of schools — decided to sit this one out. The mayor retreated on his promise to try full school choice in one of NYC's failing school districts. Politics as usual, we surmise.

But for those — like Rudy—who must think this idea a bit controversial, a new book at newsstands now, *Market Education* by Andrew Coulsen, reports that a choice system is among the accomplishments of Ancient Greece. In fact societies long before ours provided extensive choices for parents. Somehow, we've lost site of that. Check out [www.schoolchoice.org](http://www.schoolchoice.org) for information on how to get Coulsen's new book and on what's happening around the nation.

And speaking of parents, a child's first teachers, *Parent Power! Helping your Child Make Sense of Schooling*, debuts next month in mail boxes around the country. For information on a free trial subscription to this monthly newsletter, go to CER's web-site at [www.edreform.com](http://www.edreform.com).

Finally, CER's school of the week is KIPP Incorporated in Houston. KIPP Inc. works with 5-8 grade students trapped in poverty. Under the leadership of Michael Feinberg, a dedicated team of teachers offers a high-wattage educational experience that is blowing the tops off the achievement charts. By the end of the program, their

○ eighth graders are scoring at the 12<sup>th</sup> grade level in math and 10<sup>th</sup> grade level in reading. To find out more about KIPP Inc., call the school at 713-541-2561.

○ Thank you for calling the CER hotline. For additional information, please contact the center directly at 800-521-2118, and don't forget to check out our web-site at [www.edreform.com](http://www.edreform.com).

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Finally, CER's school of the week is KIPP II in Houston (add one sentence from cathy). And web info.

*The first issue of PP hits America's Mailboxes  
next ~~this~~ week! If you don't get your copy by the 26<sup>th</sup>  
Call the editor, Cathy McKenna, @ CER.*

Subject: KIPP  
Date: 03/17 8:48 AM  
Received: 03/17 10:01 AM  
From: Cara Putman, cara@edreform.com  
To: Jeanne Allen, jra@edreform.com

KIPP, Inc.: 5-8 that works with students trapped in poverty. They are having great success placing their students in private, prestigious high schools. They also have plans to hire someone next year to focus on ensuring these kids stay committed to academics once they move to high school.

As their propaganda piece puts it: "Under the leadership of Michael Feinberg, a dedicated team of teachers offers a high-wattage educational experience that is blowing the tops off the achievement charts." By the end of the eighth grade, KIPP students are scoring at the 12th grade level in math and the 10th grade level in reading.

Website: <http://nycharterschools.org>: NY Charter School Resource Center: great info on steps to starting a charter school and a sample application in addition to NY's law.

Cara Putman  
Assistant Communications Director, External Affairs  
Center for Education Reform

*J. Allen*

# THE Center for Education Reform



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Suite 204 • Washington, DC 20036

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## FAX ALERT

### CER HOTLINE ANNOUNCED

*Call 877-433-8228 for your weekly reform update!*

**(3/11/99)** As a service to parents, educators and policymakers nationwide, the Center for Education Reform today unveiled its new toll-free Hotline.

Each week, CER will highlight trends in education, late-breaking news, and notices of events or important developments in the world of education reform. The toll-free number is 877-433-8228.

More detailed information can be accessed at [www.edreform.com](http://www.edreform.com), CER's award-winning website which is updated at least three times daily.

Whether the issue be school choice, charter schools, standards and accountability, testing, curricula or finding the best available research, CER provides its customers with the tools they need to get informed, join a cause and make a difference.

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*The Center for Education Reform is a national, independent, non-profit advocacy organization providing support and guidance to individuals, community and civic groups, policymakers and others who are working to bring fundamental reforms to their schools.*

# The New York Times

Founded in 1851

ADOLPH S. OCHS D. D.

RS WEDNESDAY, APRIL 7, 1999

## Texas School District Accused of Test Tampering

AUSTIN, Tex., April 6 (AP) — The Austin school district and a deputy superintendent were indicted today on charges of tampering with state-wide tests to make their students appear smarter.

"This is not a happy day, but this action gives us the vehicle to try to correct the problems throughout the system," Ken Oden, the prosecutor, said.

A grand jury handed up 16 indictments against the Austin Independent School District and a 16-count indictment against the deputy superintendent, Margaret Kay Psencik.

The district and Ms. Psencik are

accused of tampering with Texas Assessment of Academic Skills tests, which are used to rate and compare Texas schools. The charges say they altered identification numbers on the tests of 16 students who had done poorly, so the tests would not be counted.

"Proceeding legally against both the individuals and the district itself will give us the chance to seek both personal accountability and improvement in the whole system as well," Mr. Oden said.

The school district could face fines as high as \$160,000. Ms. Psencik could face up to a year in jail.

Mr. Oden said the Austin school district could be held legally liable for the criminal acts of its employees. He emphasized that the indictment did not charge or imply personal wrongdoing by school board members, but said additional indictments were possible.

Ms. Psencik's lawyer, Roy Minton, said, "The lady has not done a single thing that's a violation of any law, nor anything that's improper."

The investigation began in September following reports that student identification numbers were changed on some assessment tests.



Arizona Education Reform Successes Topic of Field Hearing  
U.S. Newswire  
6 Apr 12:30

**Arizona Education Reform Successes Will be Topic of House Subcommittee Field Hearing April 8**  
To: State Desk  
Contact: Jay Diskey of the House Committee on Education  
and the Workforce, 202-225-4527

WASHINGTON, April 6 /U.S. Newswire/ -- Arizona's education reforms will be the topic of a Congressional field hearing scheduled for Thursday, April 8, in Scottsdale, Ariz.

U.S. Senator Jon Kyl (R-Ariz.) and State Superintendent of Public Instruction Lisa Graham Keegan are among the witnesses that will testify before the Congressional panel.

The hearing, which is titled "What Congress Can Learn from Successful State Education Reform Efforts," will be led by Rep. Matt Salmon (R-Ariz.), a member of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce. The committee's Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Youth and Families is conducting the field hearing in order to learn more about state education reforms.

The hearing will focus on innovative education initiatives recently implemented in Arizona and how such initiatives could be put into practice at the federal level. Specifically, the hearing will review legislation that would provide tax credits to families and businesses for any K-12 education expense or for organizations that provide scholarships for low-income children trapped in substandard schools. The hearing will also examine student-centered financing and the potential benefits of providing education funding on a per-pupil basis.

"Arizona is clearly a leader in education reform and Congress needs to learn more about our state's successes," Salmon said. "Arizona's approach to education reform centers on parental choice in education through charter schools, tax credits and student-centered school financing. These are innovative, common sense reforms that will benefit our children and schools."

In February, Salmon introduced H.R. 741, the "K-12 Education Excellence Now (KEEN) Act of 1999." H.R. 741 would offer every family or business a tax credit of up to \$250 annually for any K-12 education expense or activity. The tax credit could be applied to home schooling, public schools (including charter schools), or parochial schools. Allowable expenses would include tuition, books, supplies, tutors, and computer equipment. Sen. Kyl has introduced a companion bill in the U.S. Senate (S.277).

The hearing is scheduled for 10 a.m., Thursday, April 8, Scottsdale City Council Chambers, 3939 Civic Center Blvd., Scottsdale, Ariz. Witnesses include:

- Senator Kyl, will discuss S. 277.
- Lisa Graham Keegan, superintendent of public instruction for Arizona, will discuss state efforts to improve education in Arizona including tax credits, student-centered financing and parental choice.
- Jeffrey L. Flake, executive director for the Goldwater Institute, will discuss student-centered financing, Arizona's education tax credits and other education strategies.
- Hope Silbert, an educator from Sunrise Middle School in Phoenix, Ariz., will discuss the benefits of tax credits for K-12 education expenses and activities.
- Margaret A. Gillespie, a parent whose children attend catholic school in Phoenix, Ariz., will testify about the benefits of tax credits for K-12 education expenses and activities.

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04/06 12:30

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charter schools continue to thrive in urban areas, more Pittsburgh teachers will consider the charter option.

Somehow we are doing it. Northside Urban Pathways is on track to being the kind of school we had dreamed it could be. No one at the school will tell you we are where we want to be. We all want more, and that's the mark of any good school. We are learning that to be an educator with high expectations for students means putting yourself and your vision on the line every day.

We know now that we are in the middle of the challenge of our lives.

*Philip Flynn and Jeremy Resnick are co-founders of Northside Urban Pathways charter school, and are both former Pittsburgh Public School teachers.*

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*\*EXPECT is a coalition of  
reform-minded organizations  
seeking educational excellence  
for parents, children and  
teachers. For more  
information, call  
202-524-3003.*

# "Edbits"

FROM EXPECT ★ MARCH 29, 1999

## ★ WASHINGTON'S WAY OF EDUCATION

The government in Washington, D.C. runs 760 education programs in 39 different departments and agencies, and charges taxpayers more than \$100 billion annually for them.

What are taxpayers getting for their money?

## ➤ They're not getting better-educated students.

Education test scores have remained relatively flat for the past decade--and between 1966 and 1990, SAT scores dropped 62 points.

## ➤ They're not getting the full return for their local classrooms.

Each year, it takes 48.6 million hours or 25,000 employees working full time to complete all the paperwork required by the U.S. Department of Education. RESULT: Less time and less money go toward classroom teaching and learning.

No one knows for sure how much money leaving Washington ever gets to local schools. The best estimates say that only about 65 to 85 percent of the money reaches classrooms."

What SHOULD taxpayers get for their money?

★ Education professionals should be freed from filling out paperwork for the government in Washington, D.C so they can concentrate on providing excellent academic instruction for our students.

*\*Source: Education at a Crossroads: What Works and What's Wasted in Education Today, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Education and the Workforce, July 17, 1998.*

# The Edison Project

**For Release on April 7, 1999**

Contact: Chris Cerf (212) 419.1665  
Gaynor McCown (212) 419.1665

## **The Edison Project Announces Significant Achievement Gains for the Second Consecutive Year**

### **Company Releases Second Annual Report on School Performance**

**April 7, 1999**

New York – The Edison Project today issued its Second Annual Report on School Performance, which for the second consecutive year details substantial gains in student achievement. Edison currently operates 51 public schools across the country under contract with school districts and charter school boards.

Chris Whittle, President and CEO of The Edison Project said: "By any measure, average annual increases of 5% on nationally normed achievement tests reflects exciting progress. We are very pleased with these results." Added Benno Schmidt, Chairman and Chief Education Officer of The Edison Project, "We want to thank the school districts, charter boards and unions -- our local partners -- who share the credit for these positive outcomes. We are especially grateful to the over 2,000 teachers and school administrators whose hard work on behalf children is clearly paying off."

Highlights of the report include:

- ◆ Edison students are gaining, on average, more than 5 percentiles per year on nationally normed achievement tests. More specifically, Edison students have made average annual gains of 6 percentage points on criterion referenced tests and 5 percentiles on norm referenced tests.

(more)

- ◆ Parents and students are committed to the schools, as evidenced by a very low (7%) rate of student mobility. This rate is especially noteworthy given that 62% of Edison students are eligible for the federal free or reduced price lunch program, a standard proxy for economic disadvantage. Mobility rates in schools serving these children historically are very high.
- ◆ On average, 150 children are on the waiting list at every Edison school, another indicator of success and community support.
- ◆ Edison schools have produced consistently high levels of satisfaction among parents, students, staff, and clients. Edison schools have grown into higher grade levels and added students in most of their locations. No client has ever cancelled a partnership contract.
- ◆ Edison schools have made significant progress in putting in place an ambitious school design, which includes: a school organization based on academies, teams and houses; a longer school day and year; research-based instructional programs; unprecedented access to technology for teachers, students and families; new professional roles and opportunities for teachers; and strategies for increased parental involvement.

The Report also notes significant turnarounds in two schools that did not get off to strong starts in their first year. One example is that of the Washington Elementary School in Sherman, Texas which initially struggled to implement Edison's school design and educational program. Student achievement was disappointing as a result. Edison undertook a thorough restructuring together with an infusion of professional development and support. In the school's next year, Washington Elementary improved its passing rates in grade three and grade four by an average of about 25 percentage points. These increases were among the very largest of all schools in the state of Texas with similar demographics.

To ensure objectivity, The Second Annual Report on School Performance provides raw data and information on every Edison school. The information is taken from end-of-year reports that Edison is obligated by contract to provide to its partners and that are documents of public record.

# Center for Education Reform



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## Note to CER Board of Directors:

Attached is a general reform update that went to all CER fax broadcast lists, including media. In addition to this information, I wanted to share exclusively with the board the following information:

- I will be in New York from Feb. 9 -13, with a CER-sponsored lunch hosted by Peter, and the Lehman Brothers annual conference on private investment in education, as well as several editorial board and development meetings and a meeting with Steve Forbes. Lisa Keegan will be addressing the Lehman Bros event, and will be the guest at our luncheon.
- Media coverage has brought an additional flurry of activity to the Center in just the last month. Our coverage in the New York Times with Pataki's charter bill has sparked inquiries from across the nation. ABC News has asked us to keep them up to date on possible angles for their "Solutions" segment on the evening news.
- We're in the process of hiring a media director and hope to have that person on board in the next two to three weeks. This is an additional position that is desperately needed, and we have secured additional funds from an anonymous donor to bring that person on. I will fill you in more at the Board meeting as to our plans for a pro-active media program.
- An idea that arose from a meeting of reformers at La Jolla is now being put into effect through the Center's Web Page. We compiled a list of grass roots and parent-oriented groups and have contacted over 300 to ask if they'd like us to help them network through a new Education Reform Network section. The responses have been coming in rapidly, and the small ones are particularly thrilled that someone is taking interest to help them expand. The idea was borne of a discussion about the various fragmented efforts that represented "consumers" in Checker's parlance, but were not visible. Given the abundance of traffic into our web site, we anticipate this will give a huge boost to these groups, as well as to the groups listed separately under charters and private scholarship programs.
- In addition to the activity noted on the attached general fax, we have worked with legislators in Arkansas to assess their new charter school bill, and to help craft language that was politically viable for them as well as would strengthen their very weak law. We've also been called by legislators in Oklahoma, who have sought our advice on charter legislation, and have been in regular contact with people in Florida who are gearing up for a school choice legislative effort.

We'll be looking for RSVPs soon for the March 4 Board Meeting in Washington. We hope you'll be able to be there. Thanks for everything. Jeanne



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## REFORM PASSES IN CONNECTICUT HOUSE

Hartford, CT. Today a landmark education bill, guaranteeing new and expanded freedom of choice in education to the children of the state of Connecticut, passed the House of Representatives.

"This watershed victory means Connecticut teachers, parents and children are a step closer to greater freedom, autonomy and educational excellence," according to Jeanne Allen, President of The Center for Education Reform.

The amendment to a school-to-work bill allows teachers, parents or non-profit groups to "charter" new public schools, freed from extraneous government rules and regulations. It also permits Connecticut school districts to establish choice programs in which parents may choose among any public school in their district, and low-income children may attend participating private and parochial schools.

The legislation, spearheaded by Majority Leader Tom Luby (D-Meridan) and co-sponsored by Minority Leader Ed Krawiecki (R-Bristol), is the culmination of two years of work by Representatives Tim Barth (R-Naugatuck) and Jim Amann (D-Milford) the architects of the bill. Says Rep. Barth "The public has long known that this is an idea whose time has come. As other states know, it is a long, hard battle, but one that needs to be fought." Adds Rep. Amann, "We've finally made it possible for new and innovative approaches to improve our local schools and meet the needs of our diverse students."

The education reform plan was resoundingly passed by 85 (TK) Representatives in the 151 member Assembly. Meanwhile, a controversial outcome-based education bill that was scorned for lacking any real sanctions for performance failed by a wide margin.

The education reform plan must now pass the Senate, where victory is not assured, but is anticipated. The Center for Education Reform, a national non-profit clearinghouse for action and research pertaining to reform, assisted in the design of the school reform bill, and kept the public apprised of critical developments.

For more information, call The Center for Education Reform at (202) 822-9000.



# THE Center for Education Reform



1001 Connecticut Avenue, NW  
Suite 920 • Washington, DC 20036

Tel 202-822-9000  
Fax 202-822-5077

securing reform for all children. For more information, please call The Center at  
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Suite 204 • Washington, DC 20036

Tel 202-822-9000  
Fax 202-822-5077

## SAT INCREASE -- THE REAL STORY, PART II

The new 1996 SAT scores are being released today, amidst great fanfare. Another increase this year, writes the College Board, its sponsor. SATs are now the highest in 25 years screams their press release. The problem is, no one, including the College Board, knows for sure.

The difference between what was given before and now is too great, and the scores have been reformulated using the new recentering method that was announced last year. Thus this year's average of 505 on verbal and 508 on math sounds really great. Adjusted for grade inflation, it is a 1 and 2 point increase over last year respectively. But throughout the College Board's multi-page press release, there is only one real reference to the recentering in the narrative that most reporters would read, and no reference to the changes in the test instituted last year. We recap those from last year's CER alert:

- The tests have changed dramatically. As reported in the August 24, 1995 Wall Street Journal, "...the reason (for the SAT increase last year) may have more to do with changes in the test than improvement in schools" overall.

Those changes included a test that has fewer questions, longer reading passages, fewer multiple-choice math questions and no antonym section in the verbal section (WSJ, 8/24/95). Students also have longer to take the test, an additional 30 minutes, and may use a calculator.

- Those who claim that there has been no real decline in American education, such as authors of *The Manufactured Crisis* David Berliner and Bruce Biddle, have argued that the only declines in SAT scores since 1963 are due to more demographic changes among SAT takers (i.e. more disadvantaged).

In fact, as reported by State University of New York at Binghamton Professor Lawrence Stedman, the largest decline in SAT scores in the last two decades was among white students. In fact, only about 30% of the decline in the '70s was due to demographic changes in the scores, Stedman says. Only 40% who take the test report that they rank in the top 20% of their class. Yet in the last twenty years, the number of such college bound students who scored above 600 on the verbal portion of the test has slipped from 112,530 in 1972 to 73,080 in 1993, a 36% drop, despite the fact that the total number of test-takers has risen over 500,000.

- We are delighted that minorities now make up 30% of SAT takers, double the number in 1976. Over that period black students' SAT scores have increased 20 points in verbal, and 34 points in math, while white students' scores have declined 8 points in verbal and increased 2 points in math. Still, blacks continue to trail their white peers by over 100 points on each of the sections, math and verbal.

- There is good news. Students taking the test report doing more academic course work than in previous years, and taking more AP classes. The only problem is that it is unclear whether the quantity of course work translates into rigor. A glance at reading, writing, history and geography results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress would suggest that rigor is still largely missing from even the best students' course work.

cont.

- Chester Finn and Diane Ravitch, writing in the Educational Excellence Network's 1995 Report Card (the 1996 issue is just now out) said "The College Board's decision to 'recenter' the SAT scores has considerably reduced the utility of those scores as a national barometer of the educational performance of college bound students. For some two decades, the SAT has served this function, mainly because of its stable scale. The recentering however magically...gives the impression that the nation's educational deficit has been eliminated."

In a way, the apologists have won. They've been able to destroy the SAT as a useful means of student assessment, a goal that the College Board argued last year it never intended.

- Why did they artificially recenter the scores to 500 if not to boost grade inflation? In previous years, students scores were predicated on the number of questions that were correct. A perfect 1600 could only be made by getting every question right. Now up to four questions can be wrong and a student would still get a 1600. In addition, last year's average of 428 on verbal and 482 on math has been recalibrated according to the new scores to 504 and 506 respectively, thus not showing the wide gap between performance on the two disciplines. Thus students from this day forward -- and the media, and colleges -- will have no real means of comparison on which to gauge what someone's 1985 score of 510 means compared to today's score of 510.

According to College Board graphs, both original and recentered scales show that 1972 was the highpoint for SAT scores. Precipitous drops through the early eighties were followed by modest increases in the mid-eighties, another decline from '86-'91 has been followed by marginal gains from 1994 through today.

SAT scores, even with the inflationary measures, are still roughly 25 points below the 1972 high in verbal, and a few points lower from their 1972 high in math.

The College Board can provide you with their release by calling (212) 713-8000. For more information about this fax alert or other related educational developments, please call the Center at (202)- 822-9000.

###

## National PTA Deserves Detention for Bad Manners

By: Jeanne Allen

I recently was invited to address the National PTA's Annual Legislative Conference in Washington, DC. It was an opportunity I won't soon forget, for it confirmed and refueled my commitment to education reform. The attitude of the majority in the audience was one of shock and dismay as to the concepts of school choice, charter schools, and the education reform movement. And given their behavior, any school official would have sent these adults to detention for at least two weeks.

I went to talk of the reasons why people want real reform, such as charter schools, and choice, in some cases. I urged the PTA group to think "outside of the box" to consider the voices of so many across the country who have been shut out by policies and decrees that make it difficult for so many to query, to express concern, and to get things changed.

It is this frustration, well documented by such prestigious organizations as Public Agenda, and written about countless times on the pages of Education Week, that has driven parents, teachers, and some administrators to create their own charter schools. It is what led so many Cleveland, Ohio parents to line up for a limited number of scholarships the state auctioned-off for private schools, rather than forcing their children into failing schools.

Is it so radical to want public education to incorporate options for youth that they so justly deserve? The PTA obviously thinks so, by the exhibition given me as I began to speak of these things.

Never mind that the 26 charter laws around the country were passed nearly equally by Democrat and Republican legislatures and Governors. Never mind that a dozen state school chiefs now exist who believe there should be high standards, consequences for students and for teachers, and an end to tolerating mediocre performance. Never mind that the 480 charters - and nearly 200 more about to open - were started by every conceivable person or group such as The Urban League, Boys and Girls Clubs, teachers, school boards, parents, and businesses like Ford or Chrysler. Never mind that President Clinton has joined the chorus for reform, or that more and more teachers are leaving their traditional unions to find solace in non-political associations who find children their number one concern.

Those are the things I was getting ready to tell the PTA when they began talking. That's right: picture a group of some 250 adults around dinner tables, interrupting their guest speaker with conversations of doubt, jokes, and note passing. "*And these are our leaders?*," some may ask. In an era in which civility is in high demand, one could argue that a little more is in order in situations like these. Many a time, I have had to sit through things with which I've disagreed, but Mom taught me well, and I let others have their say.

Of course it's not personal, but rather the professional courtesy I saw lacking. If the National PTA - of all groups - can't sit still and quiet long enough to listen to why people are demanding choices and why charters are rapidly growing, then they can't very well be in a position to represent all parents and teachers.

For the fact is, the school bus has left the lot. Americans are fed up with "business as usual." Students tell Public Agenda that they are not challenged enough. And the establishment? Some are listening, others are busy studying how to engage the public, and others are doing cat calls.

There were a few who saw wisdom in my urging the National PTA to think "outside the box." One woman actually stood up to commend vital work that both presenters have done. Now that's civility! Others approached me quietly to say they agreed and clearly knew they were alone in that group.

There is wisdom in the NEA's declaration that "we must reform within or we will be dismantled without." Not for the PTA woman who stood up to affirm that her group represents 90% of parents in public schools, and believes it's best to "butt heads" and fight with principals rather than seek alternatives.

Do we really want to condone a world in which change comes only - if at all - because of constantly "butting heads?" And how much change has the 8.7 million member PTA made in 100 years? When 40% of students are barely reading at grade level, colleges have to provide remedial education, schools are unsafe, discipline is gone from many schools, and battles over phonics, or new math - or you name it - result in nothing but local political warfare?

I'll throw my towel in with public education's *real* advocates, the reformers who are trying to beat back bad rules, create new and accountable schools for all children, not just those in affluent communities, and who believe that bad news is cause for urgency, not transferring blame.

And at least they're courteous enough to listen, even if they may not agree.

**Jeanne Allen is President of The Center for Education Reform, a national, non-profit advocacy organization providing support and guidance to individuals nationwide who are working to bring fundamental reforms to their schools.**

**THE NEA AND SCHOOL REFORM  
GIFT HORSE OR TROJAN HORSE?**  
by Jeanne Allen, President  
The Center for Education Reform

Last Spring NEA President Keith Geiger, saying "The world has changed," announced a \$1.5 million effort to create five charter schools in five U.S. cities. The next day, an editorial cartoon in the Arizona Republic depicted a wolf, identified as the "status quo," wearing an ill-fitting sheep skin identified as the "NEA's Charter Schools." (To further drive home the point, the sheep skin was also sporting an "I Heart Reform" button.)

Such is the skepticism of education reformers. Is the establishment being saintly or cynical? Have they truly embraced the concept of charter schools or, after years of being against us, and losing ground in the debate, have they simply found it necessary to appear to be with us?

It's a fair question, albeit an unfortunate one. Because while it would be nice to welcome them into the fold of reform, you have to wonder about such a sudden conversion, and worry about whether the NEA's effort is a gift horse, or a Trojan horse.

For my money, the NEA has it backwards. Instead of opening charter schools it can call its own, why doesn't it launch a campaign to assist states in adopting or revising charter laws that will allow local citizens to open schools that they can call *their* own? Or at least call off the dogs that are unleashed every time a strong charter bill appears in a state legislature.

The NEA, in concert with its state and local chapters and various associations, are notorious for running strong legislation to ground, mauling it, then proudly waving the lifeless, empty carcass as a victory for (to quote the Druid chant of the educrats everywhere) "the democratic principles that are public education."

So what is there to say that this isn't simply another, grander, more sophisticated, public relations ploy by the education establishment? Unfortunately, nothing. Especially in light of their recent cynical "scientific" poll which purports to show Republican voters' support for a federal role in education and opposition to vouchers. Based on biased questions posed to an unrepresentative sampling universe, all designed to gain appropriately skewed data, the NEA's poll was a transparent attempt to discredit substantive reform efforts and cast itself in the role of being on the right track to reform, which just happens to be a continuation of the status quo.

Perhaps the most telling thing about the NEA's true motivations can be found in its own three-line description of what it is and who it represents. Telling, not so much in what it says as in what it doesn't say. The description reads: "The National Education Association is the nation's largest professional employee organization, representing more than 2.2 million elementary and secondary teachers, higher education faculty, education support personnel, school administrators, retired educators and students preparing to become teachers."

Here's what it doesn't say. The NEA is a labor union — the nation's largest labor union. Its concerns are for its rank file. Its issues are collective bargaining issues. And its goals are those which will further the demands of its members. And here's what else it doesn't say: the NEA does not represent children, parents, or communities.


The NEA in the mainstream? Supporting charter schools and defending the true desires of American parents and voters? A leader in the education reform movement? As we now say as a result of the legend of the Trojan Horse, "Beware of Greeks bearing gifts."


# Center for Education Reform





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February 4, 1997


 The Center for Education Reform Issues Third Edition of National Charter School Directory  
November 15, 1996


 Poll Results Challenge Previous Findings; Public is Frustrated by Education Quality, Does Support School Choice  
September 11, 1996


 Allen Calls NEA Poll "Bunk"  
August 15, 1996


 Study Shows School Choice Works  
August 9, 1996


 Court Rules Cleveland School Choice Program Constitutional  
August 1, 1996


 NEA Convention  
July 3, 1996


 Charters, Lawsuits and Union Elections: A Whirlwind of Education Reform News  
July 1, 1996

 The Center For Education Reform Files Amicus Brief In Ohio School Choice Case  
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 The Center for Education Reform Issues Comprehensive Charter School Directory  
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 [U.S. House Passes DC Reform Bill; Voucher Included, But Senate Fate Uncertain](#)  
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