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HOT-LINE

October

1999

Hotline 10/29

Just when you thought it was safe.... Welcome to another week of the Center for Education Reform's weekly Hot-line, which is both scary for its content and for its relevance to this Halloween week which is upon us.

Let's start with New York, where the NY school boards association has gone batty and is challenging the state's flexible charter law, hoping to prevent charter schools from continuing. While many individual school board members are personally supportive of reform, the state and national school board groups have begun to strategically block strong charter efforts and schools from opening.

Some ninety charter school applications were received by the State University of New York, demonstrating that there's tremendous interest in this issue. Perhaps that's why the school boards group is suddenly panicked. What a shame their focus isn't more squarely on kids.

The new Chairman of the Illinois state board of education appears to understand his job. According to the Illinois Charter School Facts, chairman Ron Gidwitz says that we need to try some new things since schools are failing. He's a supporter of greater choice for children, which is not on the agenda of the national groups that represent state board of education members.

And speaking of state boards, Arizona officials conducted a survey and found that seventy percent of charter school parents are happy with their child's charter schools and see them as a viable alternative to traditional public education and not merely an experiment.

Other surveys recently released include a parent satisfaction survey of elementary schools sponsored by the Educational Testing Service, which administers several popular tests, including the SAT. The results are dubious, however. More than half of those surveyed say they were satisfied with their child's elementary school, and the higher the income level, the higher the satisfaction rate. Cleveland parents were most dissatisfied. However, the real question should be whether or not we've lowered our expectations. Being satisfied isn't necessarily something to crow about. Perhaps Mick Jagger could weigh in on this one....

Thanks for calling the Center's hot-line, if you have further questions please call the office directly at 800-521-2118. Before the year ends, look for several new publications on charter schools. Our first ever Charter School Survey results and a millenium end report on the state of charter schools, their successes, effects on local school districts, the facts behind the failures and the obstacles they face. Don't forget to visit our website for in-depth updates on education reform across the nation. Have a safe and goulish Halloween!

Hotline 10/22

The Ohio Department of Education disputes a claim by the Cleveland Teachers Union that the state illegally let four private schools convert into charter schools. Education Department spokeswoman Lee Ann Rogers said the conversions were legal because the schools gave up their old charters and appointed new governing boards. But the unions keep trying to undermine charters. As we reported last week these groups are holding a rally on Saturday designed to highlight the misinformation that they have been putting out in flyers and now on the radio. These claims are all, of course, totally untrue. In fact, community, or charter, schools will be held more accountable than other public schools. Along with test scores, report cards, annual reports, audits, and LOEO studies, community schools will also be held to the accountability plan in their contracts. This means that sponsors can close a low performing school. How many other public schools will be held to this standard?

In Oregon, the state Board of Education on Wednesday authorized the first two schools to operate under the state's new charter school law. The first two schools to become official charter schools are Lourdes, near Scio, and an alternative school in the Molalla River School District. Because the schools already are operating as alternative schools, the state board granted them waivers from a rule requiring school organizers to wait 120 days from the time they apply for approval until they can open. But as can be expected the teachers union stands against the reform. They have launched an initiative petition drive to send the voters a measure next year that would repeal the charter school law.

In Florida, The Hillsborough County School Board approved a plan Tuesday to convert the district to a charter school. The board voted to send the charter school district plan to the state Department of Education. The plan calls for class sizes of 18 students per teacher, extended school days and an extended school year, more freedom to hire teachers who are certified out of state and the expansion of pre-kindergarten services to more families. Florida has 3 districts that have applied out of the 6 possible under the 1998 law, "Charter School Districts Pilot Program."

In Arizona, the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors has established some standards that charter and private schools will have to meet if they locate inside county islands or in county rural areas. The established standards would require that a charter school must sit on 5 acres, must have a fence separating it from homes and the building must be set back 100 feet from adjacent property. What does this mean? Regulation CREEP imposed by those that oppose charters! And we are keeping an eye on it.

In Missouri, following up on our story last week. the state Board of Education voted Thursday to revoke Kansas City's accreditation in May 2000 because of the district's failure to meet any of the state standards for student performance. The district had been provisionally accredited since 1993. The board did not strip accreditation from the St. Louis district. Instead it voted to give St. Louis 2 years to improve its performance.

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Date: ~~Oct 26 1999 16:55:44 EDT~~
From: "Center for Education Reform Newswire" <EdReform-owner@listbot.com>
Subject: Unions Threaten Charter Success

The latest news in education from The Center for Education Reform,
<http://www.edreform.com>.

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Education Daily Summary October 15, 1999

By Christine Lynd

"ED Criticizes Title I Bill But Makes No Veto Threat"

House lawmakers have come out with a bill aiding education for low-income children, H.R. 2. The bill, supported by Republicans and Democrats, prompted Education Secretary Riley to send a 6 -page letter to House lawmakers warning that the bill falls short. The bill was not revised, however.

"Poll: Teachers, Principals Support Standards Push"

Two new polls have revealed that teachers and principals recognize benefits of standardized testing and support efforts to keep schools accountable. A national sample of AFT members showed that 75% of teachers and 92% of principals on a four-state sample favored higher standards. AFT president Sandra Feldman said "Now we must shift our focus to giving students and teachers the right kind of supports to make these initiatives work." More poll findings are included in the article.

Notes?

"Project to Examine Effect of Mentors on Teacher Attrition"

A new mentoring program being studied at East Carolina University may reduce teacher attrition rates for special education teachers. The Mentoring Induction Project is designed to pair first-year special ed. teachers with experienced mentors. Teacher attrition rates for special education teachers run about 50% in some districts.

"Appeals Likely in VA, MD, Race-Based Admission Cases"

School officials in Arlington, VA are seeking an appeal of the federal appeals court decision that race based admission systems are unconstitutional. In Montgomery County, MD, school officials are deciding whether to appeal an October 6th decision, which struck down a county school transfer policy designed to keep school enrollments diverse.

"WAM! Announces New Anti-Violence Television Campaign"

WAM! America's Kidz Network recently announced a multiyear anti-violence campaign, "Generation Hope: Voices for Change." They will offer anti-violent programming and sponsor an anti-violence marathon.

EDUCATION DAILY

The education community's independent daily news service

ED Criticizes Title I Bill But Makes No Veto Threat

Although House lawmakers have written a bill promoting education for low-income, migrant, neglected and homeless students that commands bipartisan support, the Clinton administration has a long list of objections.

The House Education and the Workforce Committee this week endorsed H.R. 2, a Title I reauthorization plan embraced by the likes of Reps. Matt Salmon, R-Ariz., and George Miller, D-Calif. (ED, Oct. 14).

Salmon wanted provisions requiring parental consent for bilingual education, and Miller wanted provisions urging Title I schools to close the achievement gap between minority and non-minority students, and between low-income children and their more affluent peers.

Education Secretary Richard Riley, however, has sent a six-page letter to House lawmakers warning that their Title I bill falls short of the administration's goals, notably on permitted teaching practices for paraprofessionals (ED, Oct. 8). The committee did not revise the bill to accommodate the administration's demands.

Accountability Problems?

Riley stopped short of threatening to recommend a presidential veto, requesting cooperation from House lawmakers instead.

He wrote that the Education Department opposes provisions in H.R. 2 that would:

- Compel Title I schools to show that subgroups of children—such as economically disadvantaged, limited-English-proficient (LEP), minority and disabled students—all make achievement gains at the state, district and local levels. "No state in the nation has developed an accountability system with performance requirements as specific and rigid as those prescribed in the bill," Riley wrote;

(more on p. 2)

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Poll: Teachers, Principals Support Standards Push

Teachers and principals are seeing benefits from recent standards-based reforms at their schools and strongly support efforts to hold students accountable to high academic standards, according to two new polls.

The surveys, sponsored by the Albert Shanker Institute, asked teachers and principals their views on the standards-based reform efforts, which the poll defined as encompassing new academic standards; curriculum changes; regular testing based on standards; and consequences for students, faculty and schools.

Almost 75 percent of a national sample of teachers who are members of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), and 92 percent of principals in a four-state sample, favor the push to raise standards, the polls found.

Teachers' support for elevated standards cut across racial and economic lines of the students they instruct, officials said.

"The polls show that the standards movement has enlisted the support of teachers and principals in all kinds of schools, even those with the biggest problems," said Sandra Feldman, president of the million-member AFT, which established the Shanker Institute last year to honor their late leader, who served as head of the union from 1970 to 1997.

(more on p. 3)

Poll: Teachers, Principals Support Standards (Cont. from p. 1)

"It's encouraging to see that they are out there trying to meet the challenge these new demands set for them," she added. "Now we must shift our focus to giving students and teachers the right kind of supports to make these initiatives work."

The longer teachers work with standards-linked reforms, the more they view them as being positive, the poll said.

Almost 75 percent of teachers who worked with standards for at least six years cited a positive impact, compared with 62 percent of teachers who had used standards for three years or less.

Support was especially high among older teachers, elementary school teachers and urban teachers polled.

However, while teachers said standards-based reforms are the right approach, they faulted states and schools for spotty implementation. For example:

- 55 percent of teachers said a focus on test scores has narrowed the curriculum in a negative fashion;
- 39 percent of teachers and 36 percent of principals say testing is too frequent; and

- 80 percent of teachers favor more paid training that focuses on how to help students meet standards.

Poll respondents also named smaller class size, clearer discipline policies, reading programs, improved curriculum and higher salaries as other reforms that could improve their schools. Higher salaries came in last on the list, a finding that shows teachers "[put] students' needs first," Feldman said.

The polls follow a Public Agenda survey last year that found strong public support for requiring students to meet standards or be held back a grade.

In that survey, teachers and parents polled by the public interest research group equally condemned social promotion: Roughly 80 percent of both groups said passing children who didn't meet standards is worse than holding them back.

Peter D. Hart Research Associates, a Washington-based polling firm, conducted the two polls of 1,075 AFT teachers and 825 principals.

The poll is free from the Albert Shanker Institute, 555 New Jersey Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20001, (202)879-4401. —Jonathan Fox

WAM! Announces New Anti-Violence Television Campaign

WAM! America's Kidz Network recently announced its multiyear anti-violence campaign, "Generation Hope: Voices for Change."

The network is designed to provide meaningful programming and tangible tools that students and schools can implement in the wake of last school year's rash of teen violence, with the goal of instilling kids with a sense of respect for others and personal accountability.

The commercial-free network targeted at children ages 8 to 16 will include original programming events, short-form features and easily replicated anti-violence activities kids can do in their own homes and schools.

Examples of programming include "Mark's Web World," which addresses online hate and violence; an anti-violence marathon with

several series that address conflict resolution; and a 13-part series called "Talk Box," a magazine-format show that addresses relevant teen topics.

Throughout the campaign, WAM! also will offer short programming, including "Celebrity Voices for Change," "Community Voices for Change" and "Peace Chain."

"The safety of our kids is the number-one issue of our time," said Midge Pierce, vice president of programming for the network. "It is imperative that we empower them to feel safe in the classroom by providing problem solving tools and conflict resolution."

For more information, contact Marc McCarthy, Encore Media Group, (303)267-4098; e-mail, mccarthy.marc@encoremedia.com.

—Linda Connolly

10/21

Today the US House of Representatives rejected Majority Leader Dick Arney's *Safe and Sound Schools Amendment*. Once again, preservation of the status quo prevailed over the academic needs of our children.

The amendment to the ESEA reauthorization would have established a 5-year pilot program designed to create a national school choice option for elementary school children (grades 1-5) trapped in failing public schools. But the House folded to the traditional vested interest.

Meanwhile, school choice is awakening across the country. Parents are tired with unresponsive and failing schools. The growing waiting lists for private scholarship programs, tuitioning programs, and charter schools demonstrates the demand. This is especially true of poorer parents. They want to provide their children the opportunities of education, but because they are poor and trapped in a failing school's zip code that will not happen. Once again, a child's education opportunity withers while politicians and educrats fiddle.

THE Center for Education Reform



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NEWS ALERT

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Hotline

Contact: Mary Kayne Heinze
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JUSTICE GETS SPANKED, MISSOURI URBAN SCHOOLS FAIL AGAIN AND THE OHIO EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

(October 15, 1999) *Parents Prevail!* The Justice Department got a spanking at a Thursday hearing by a congressional committee.

The cause for the hearing was the Justice Department's intrusion into charter schools into Louisiana. Despite the personal choice of parents in determining the best education for their child, Justice took it upon itself to restrict the flow of parental choices and demand oversight into who attends each charter school in areas where court desegregation once played a role.

So for months, charter schools in Baton Rouge have been obstructed at every step of the way. Finally, Congress took note, and told the Justice Department it had no right to interfere in the private choices of families. CER will have a full report on the resolution of the committee later this month.

Busted. In another tale of systems lacking accountability, St. Louis and Kansas City, Missouri school systems are about to lose accreditation for failing to educate students. Both school districts have been the recipients of millions of dollars extra in support over the last fifteen years, and despite increased funding again last year, Kansas City failed to meet any of the eleven standards for accreditation. St. Louis met only three of them. State officials called results on the state's assessment tests "substandard." St. Louis Superintendent Cleveland Hammonds didn't let school failure get in the way of using his new state money to sue the state over the charter school law, which permits charters to be authorized by universities in both KC and St. Louis. His suit comes on the heels of his pressuring all but one St. Louis area university to not charter any schools. This year, fifteen charter schools opened in Kansas City, attracting about ten percent of the enrollment of the entire school district. Only Washington DC comes close to that saturation point after two years of charter schools operating there.

The Empire Strikes Back. In related news about arrogance and power, a coalition of more than a dozen education special interest groups are rallying on October 23rd in Cincinnati, Ohio to protest the establishment of Ohio's community, or charter schools. Most of what the coalition opposes about charter schools is in fact untrue. For example, this group alleges in fliers it has distributed statewide that community schools don't have to take state tests, which is false. They also suggest that charters don't have to do background checks on teachers, or enroll special education children - again all falsehoods. The Ohio Education Blob of course had nothing valid to rally against. Their motto must be - when in doubt, create problems.

A Few Good Men. But there is good news. Wyoming Principal of the Year Norm Carrell was recognized as one of fifty National Distinguished Principals in Washington on Thursday. Carrell is principal of Ft. Casper Academy, his state's first parent-initiated public school of choice, which uses Core Knowledge, Spaulding and Saxon as the three pillars of its curriculum. That curriculum has brought the school from the fiftieth percentile to the mid-nineties in just a few short years. We're delighted such reform-minded leaders are being recognized appropriately. Maybe St. Louis and Kansas City officials need to take a road trip to Wyoming and other places to see what really works and leave the lawsuits to people who really need the courts. Congratulations, Norm!

Hello and welcome to the Center for Education Reform's weekly hot-line. This week beginning Friday October 8.

^{now} Vouchers will reach the nations highest court in 2000. On the agenda is Mitchell vs Helms, a case involving public funding of parochial schools, or at least a federal program that provides computers, televisions, library materials and other supplies to parochial schools. Lower courts across the country seem to continuously be debating this issue. The court has persistently avoided hearing cases involving public tuition assistant for parochial schools.

In other legal issues, the House Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on the Constitution will hold oversight hearings on desegregation and charter schools next Thursday, October 14. Specifically it will be investigating the Justice Departments use of desegregation decrees to limit the creation of charter schools. If justice is blindfolded she's peaking. At least 19 charter schools states are subject to desegregation orders and have the potential to be prevented from providing access to equal educational opportunities for minority children.

Along with other states in 1981 the federal courts put a desegregation order on Benton Harbor Michigan. In order for a new school to open it must meet a list of criteria that works to maintain the present racial status quo. Although Advantage had gained approval for its Benton Harbor Charter School they had to go to court to defend their right to open when challenged because of the racial makeup of the student enrollment. This summer Advantage had begun extensive remodeling to the permanent facility. The construction was delayed until the courts made their first decision. Once that happened construction was way behind schedule. So far behind that the local school board filed a petition that said the delays and uncertainties have hampered their efforts to meet federal desegregation regulations. Last Friday the judge agreed with the district and pulled the state and federal cash until next year. Advantage has stated that they will absorb the almost 3.1 million in lost funding themselves as well as fund the 1999-2000 school year and open no later than November 15 anyway.

The wrap on the National Education Summit may hold some surprises. What remains to be seen is whether all the lofty ideals agreed upon will bear fruit. The call for rigorous curriculums and professional development programs will need more than the feel good environment of the summit to succeed. Reformers will need to be sure that alternative opportunities for children be available in case these proposed interventions fail.

Does size count? The results of an independent examination of ~~total~~ 277 studies on class size effects show that only 15 percent suggested that there is a "statistically significant" improvement in achievement, 72 percent found no effect at all, and 13 percent found that reducing class size actually had a negative effect on achievement.

Thank you for calling the Center for Education Reform's Hot-line, if you have further questions, please call our offices at 800-521-2118. Thanks and have a great week!

Education Daily Summary October 1, 1999

By Christine Lynd

"Congress Wrestles With Funding, Veto Threat"

Senate lawmakers will not provide more funding for after school programs and the House shifts \$50 million from education technology account to a vocational education account. Clinton still insists that the House bill does not adequately support his initiatives to reduce class size, improve teacher quality, etc.

"Vouchers, Voting Rights Top High Court's Agenda"

This fall the Supreme Court is set to hear Mitchell vs. Helms, a case involving public funding of parochial schools. Other educationally related cases that the court may hear could include school prayer, school board votes, and the appropriate use of student fees at colleges and universities. The First Amendment's establishment clause, which bans government endorsement of religion, will be a hot topic.

"House GOP Renews Bid to Eliminate E-Rate Program"

House Republicans renew attack on funding structure of the e-rate program, which uses long-distance fees to subsidize the purchase of Internet connections and computer equipment for schools. They want the tax reduced, and the Commerce Department to administer the program.

"New ED Center to Focus On Schoolwide Reforms"

The National Clearinghouse for Comprehensive School Reform, commissioned by the Education Department, will help educators to research and compare school reform designs.

"Schoolwide" reform is an increasingly popular strategy for low-performing schools. However, a recent American Institute of Research report, notes that only 3 out of 24 schoolwide reform designs they studied demonstrated positive effects on achievement.

"Plans for Upgrading Instruction in Troubled Schools"

This is a one page chart that lists educational problems, the current law, Clinton's plan, and the Republican's plan.

Helms
★

Vouchers, Voting Rights Top High Court's Agenda

Multiple lawsuits over student-led prayer and taxpayer funding of parochial schools have worked their way through federal circuits and now await a coveted opportunity to go before the Supreme Court this fall. Although the parties involved in several such cases are still hoping they will be reviewed, the high court has already accepted one case that will decide whether public funds may be used to support parochial schools.

The highly selective court has agreed to hear two other education cases so far: one addressing minority voting rights in school board elections, and another focusing on the appropriate use of mandatory student fees at colleges and universities. First Amendment Issues But this session, which begins Monday, may be the one in which the Supreme Court satisfies school districts and advocacy groups by breaking its prolonged silence on legal conflicts over school prayer and related issues that have surfaced in the federal circuits in recent years.

The spectrum of cases on this issue reflects the many legal and philosophical differences at the root of conflicts over what constitutes a violation of the First Amendment's establishment clause, which bans government endorsement of religion. The court last June agreed to hear *Mitchell v. Helms* (98-1932), which will decide the legality of programs in Louisiana, and the nation, that use public funds to support parochial schools. At issue is a federal program that provides computers, televisions, library materials and other supplies to parochial schools (ED, June 15).

Courts around the country have grappled with how to apply the Supreme Court's precedents banning the use of publicly funded school vouchers, tax credits and other programs that allow parents to send their children to religious schools on the taxpayers' dollar. The court last November turned away a case in which the Wisconsin Supreme Court allowed Milwaukee to expand its school voucher program to include religious academies (ED, Nov. 10).

Now, two cases are asking the court to review the tuition program not as direct state aid, but as neutral, indirect aid that allows parents to select which schools their children will attend. Both cases—*Strout v. Maine Department of Education* (98-1986) and *Bagley v. Raymond School Department* (98-281)—challenge a Maine statute that gives students without a local public school the chance to attend public or private secular schools in their area, at the state's expense (ED, June 4).

The Maine attorney general directed the state legislature to leave religious schools out of the program; parochial school parents unsuccessfully fought to overturn that decision. Waiting For Action The U.S. Supreme Court has not yet decided whether to review the Maine cases, but several other voucher cases around the country await action on the matter. For example, an Arizona case challenges a \$500 tax credit available to state taxpayers who pay private school tuition. About three-quarters of the private schools in the state are religious.

The Arizona Supreme Court upheld the program in February, pointing to a 1983 U.S. Supreme Court case that ruled legal a Minnesota tax deduction program that was

applicable to expenses at both public and private schools, secular and sectarian (ED, Jan. 28).

In another case, the court is expected to accept for review a New York appeal involving a state law that allows a separate school district for disabled Hasidic Jewish children. In June, the high court temporarily blocked a New York court ruling that banned the special school district. The case, *Grumet v. George Pa-taki* (98-1932) last reviewed in 1994, has wound its way through the New York state court system after the legislature tried several times to revise the law that created the district (ED, July 19).

Prayer Answered?

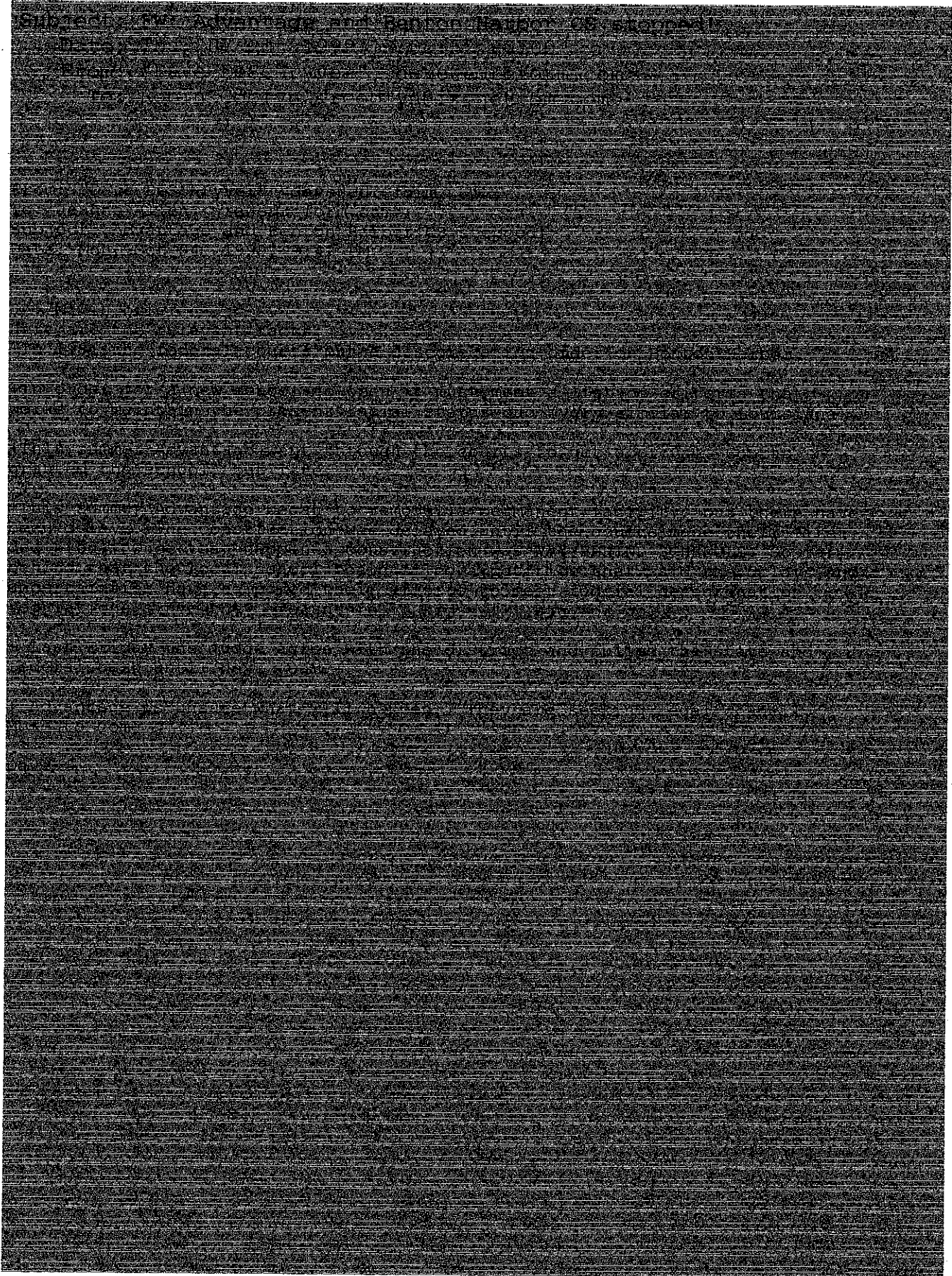
A school prayer case awaiting a review decision may give the court a chance to settle another element of this thorny legal debate. *Santa Fe Independent School District v. Doe* (99-62) seeks to overturn a 5th Circuit Court of Appeals decision that barred the Santa Fe Independent School Board from allowing prayer at football games (ED, March 11). This month, a federal district judge in Galveston, Texas, ordered the district to allow a pre-game prayer even though school officials had been abiding by the appeals court ruling while it awaits a decision on a Supreme Court review. The court last took up this issue in the 1992 case of *Lee v. Weisman* (9505 U.S. 577), which held that the establishment clause does not allow public school officials to invite clergy to lead prayers at graduations. But the Supreme Court has yet to rule on whether student-led prayers are acceptable. And courts across the country are issuing very different rulings on the matter. For example, in a case that contradicts the Santa Fe ruling, a federal judge from the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals in Atlanta ruled in July that school districts are free, if not obliged, to allow student-led prayers with religious content at football games, graduations or other occasions. The court called failing to do so "the most egregious form of content-based censorship" (ED, July 15).

Legal experts and others say the twisted issue is ready for a high court review. "The time has arrived for the Court to take the thorniest out-standing church-state issues and resolve them," the Rev. Barry Lynn told *The New York Times*. The justices "could literally set into stone the constitutional principles of the last 25 years, or they could dramatically alter them, just by taking two cases" now pending on appeal, said Lynn, an attorney and minister who works for Americans United for Separation of Church and State. His group advocates a strict separation of church and state and often files briefs in these cases. Other cases the court has accepted for review are: *Brzonkala v. Antonio Morrison* (99-29), accepted for review Sept. 28, involves a Virginia Tech student who is seeking the right to sue the college football player who attacked her. But the case involves the broader issue of rape victims' right to seek damages from their attackers in federal court (ED, Sept. 29).

Σ *Reno v. Bossier Parish School Board* (98- 405) and its companion case, *Price v. Boss-ier Parish School Board* (98-406), are scheduled for oral arguments on Oct. 6. The cases challenge a Louisiana school board's post-1990 Census drawing of voting districts, which created white majorities in all 12 districts. The court heard oral arguments on the case last session but was unable to reach a decision (ED, April 27).

Σ *Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System v. Southworth* (98-118) will decide whether a state university's allocation of mandatory student fees to political and

ideological groups violates the First Amendment rights of students who object to subsidizing the groups (ED, March 30). Σ Kimel v. Florida Board of Regents (98-791) and U.S. v. Florida Board of Regents (98-796), two consolidated cases, are scheduled for oral argument on Oct. 13 on the question of whether public university faculty may sue their state employers under a federal law banning age discrimination (ED, Jan. 27).



Subject: Fwd: Bill Lann Lee & Charter Schools
Date: 10/07 3:09 PM
Received: 10/07 10:31 AM
From: JeanneAllen, jra@edreform.com
To: Robin Coblyn, robin@edreform.com

Hotline Fodder. Also -- Benton Harbor in Michigan. Ask Dave
----- Begin Forwarded Message -----

Date: 10/06 4:25 PM
Received: 10/06 6:02 PM
From: Maureen Blum, mblum@ij.org
To: Maureen Blum, mblum@ij.org

ADVISORY

EVENT: Justice Department Assault on Charter Schools
Subject of Congressional Oversight Hearing

TIME/DATE: 10 a.m./Thursday, October 14, 1999

PLACE: Rayburn House Office Building
Room 2237
Washington, DC

CONTACT: Maureen Blum, Director of Outreach Programs
Institute for Justice, (202) 955-1300

SUMMARY:

The House Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on the Constitution will hold an oversight hearing on desegregation and charter schools next Thursday, October 14 at 10 a.m. in the Rayburn House Office Building, Room 2237. The Subcommittee will investigate the Justice Department's use of desegregation decrees to limit the creation of charter schools in Louisiana and elsewhere.

"The Clinton Administration purports to back charter schools, but uses its Justice Department arsenal to thwart them," declared Clint Bolick, litigation director at the Institute for Justice, who will testify at the hearing. The Institute is preparing a test case in East Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where the Justice Department blocked a charter school that would serve a heavily black student population.

"It is perverse to use desegregation decrees to prevent minority schoolchildren from gaining access to equal educational opportunities," Bolick added.

Other witnesses at the hearing will include an official of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division; Rolfe McCollister, editor of the Baton Rouge Business Report and a backer of the proposed United Charter School in East Baton Rouge; community activist Larry Galloway; and Louann Bierlein, education advisor to Louisiana Governor Mike Foster.



The charter school controversy is an example of the out-of-control Civil Rights Division under "acting" Assistant Attorney General Bill Lann Lee, according to the Institute. The issue has widespread potential ramifications. At least 19 charter school states are subject to desegregation orders and could be prevented by the Civil Rights Division from providing educational opportunities to minority children.

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10/1 Hatline

The National Assessment Governing Board released the results of the 1998 writing assessment by NAEP, also known as the Nation's Report Card, and things didn't look too good. Sadly, American students are still performing below expected levels with 75% not writing up to grade level. Earlier this year similar reading results were released from NAEP. TIMMS, an international study for science and math, showed American students scoring near the bottom of the industrialized nations surveyed. ~~Do we see a trend here?~~

Yet more proof that voucher programs are not "creaming" after all: If you remember last week we reported figures from the San Antonio choice program, now a local school district in Florida's Escambia County did an analysis of the kids that took advantage of the A+ program. Of the 134 children using vouchers to transfer to new schools, about half performed above their old schools' pupil averages in reading and math, and half below. They also found that more than two-thirds of participating kids scored below national averages in these two areas.

A hot topic everywhere, Florida's choice program has drawn the attention of the House Budget Committee whose last week hearings focused on "cutting edge" education reforms. Vouchers, especially Florida's A+ program became the focal point.

Keeping the heat on choice once again are the NAACP and People for the American Way. These powerful National organizations are trying to dissuade people in Detroit who are looking for alternatives to district schools. They have established "Partners for Public Education", a public awareness campaign that espouses the negative consequences of school vouchers.

I wonder where he gets his numbers? In his keynote address to attendees of the National Education Summit today President Bill Clinton once again practically took sole responsibility for the burgeoning charter school numbers. His advisors need to get up to speed however, the President stated there was nearly 1300 charter schools open this Fall, but up to the minute CER numbers show a significantly higher number, 1680. Thanks to scores of people, Mr. President, you are much closer to your 3000 charter schools goal than even you thought.

Governors and leaders at the National Education Summit are also stressing standards, but they are dangerously close to suggesting that there are already uniformly high standards across the country, but there are not. Additionally the test that assess these standards vary wildly from state to state and in some instances district to district. To find out more read your soon to hit the stands October issue of Parent Power! If you don't get it, get it by calling the Center at 202-822-9000.

And lastly, If approved by educators, CEOs and governors at the Summit, at least ten states will test a program that ties teacher salaries to student achievement. A good step, but must be complimented by other reforms to have any impact.