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## CER Newswire

January 12, 2000

Happy New Year!

This is the first CER newswire of the New Year, and we're resolved to continue our weekly delivery of vital information to you from around the country each week.

First we go northwest to Oregon, where the first charter school under that state's 1999 law was just tentatively approved. It's a bit of a cause celebre there, as the McCoy school has had its share of struggles since it announced its intention to charter. Becky Black is an educator that took in failing and troubled students from the Portland school district for several years. The district paid her to educate these children, but when she announced that she wanted to charter, the success came to a screeching halt. After several months back and forth in negotiations (Oregon's law requires school board approval), it seems as if the McCoy charter school was finally approved. Let's hope it's the specter of good things to come.

Speaking of which, the following comes directly from the New Jersey Charter School Information Center, which does a great job of monitoring charter school progress and providing necessary technical assistance:

"Tune in! Students from Oceanside Charter School in Atlantic City have recorded the first song on their upcoming CD, a project to be completed in conjunction with Platinum Sound Recording Studios. The students' first release entitled "It's Tough Being A Kid" explores the challenges young people face in their homes, schools, and communities. Proceeds will benefit the completion of the school's new facility. Plans are already in the works to promote the song on well-known radio stations in the New York and Philadelphia areas. Let's wish Oceanside much success with this exciting venture! Read more about this at <http://206.43.192.183/content/fri/axu70146.html>.

The Garden State, incidentally, just approved 14 new charter schools. However, darkness still looms in the legislature, where numerous bills to limit their autonomy and funding are pending.

The *Illinois Charter School Facts* (618-233-0428 to get on the list) reports that the fourth proposal for a charter school has been filed in St. Louis, MO, which currently has none. The K-2 school is being sponsored by a chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, and would focus on math, science and technology. The proposal was made to Harris Stowe State College. Currently a bill is pending in the Show-Me State that would allow some funding to chartering authorizers, a move which observers say would help the chartering process there immensely.

Incidentally, the lawsuit by the School Boards Association in Missouri challenging the charter law was dismissed by a judge last week. The Center had filed an amicus brief in that case along with seven existing charter schools stating that there's nothing unconstitutional about creating new public schools.

Legislators nationwide are bracing for a busy season...Look for more news on charters, proposals to revamp the teaching profession and a whole myriad of things in the coming weeks from the Center.



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## Newsire #2

January 17, 2000

On this day that commemorates the birth of Martin Luther King, Jr., we should keep freedom and equality fresh in mind when looking at what's do be done for those not well served by our schools.

Several great accomplishments last week fit in with the move toward ensuring greater opportunity for all...

Yippee for Arkansas, which has had a rough time trying to eke out any charter schools under its law. Now, with some modest changes made and a new surge of effort, the state's first charter school was approved. The Grace Hill Elementary School in the Rogers School District is proposing to convert with more flexibility to restructure staffing and instruction. Four other schools are proposing conversion programs, and another nine proposals to create new charter schools are pending.

From the Texas Public Policy Foundation comes this news about a Texas State Board of Ed vote last week to revoke a charter. TPPF said:

...it demonstrates the success of the education reform and charter school movement. It also points out a double standard. Unlike traditional public schools, accountability for charter schools is swift and decisive. If parents are dissatisfied, they can remove their child. If the State Board is dissatisfied, they will revoke the school's charter.

Charter schools give parents more freedom to choose their child's education, and schools more freedom to teach. Freedom and accountability go hand in hand. The State Board is right to shut down bad charter schools and parents are right to select another school.

Well-known venture capitalist John Doerr holds similar views. "It's OK for charter schools to fail. We have to encourage risk-taking. That's what makes truly great entrepreneurs," he told a business audience at last week's Children's Scholarship Fund conference.

That conference brought together hundreds of committed business leaders and companies that are providing a wide variety of services to schools to help educate children.

Those companies, which include some of the leaders in providing instruction in hundreds of charter schools, illustrate that it's possible to teach children outside of the bureaucratic barriers that plague education. This is particularly true when one considers the latest research, released just last week in the *Quality Counts 2000* publication, entitled "Who Should Teach," published by Education Week.

Among the findings is that eleven states have no basic skills testing requirement for teachers, and of the 39 that do require basic skills tests, 36 allow teachers in the classroom even if they haven't passed.

One in five novice teachers leave after 5 years, and generally, those who are less academically able go into teaching.

There's more bad news — none of which we relish. But it's also clear that no amount of advanced degrees and money will solve the exit and entry problem until more control is allowed at the school level and there are incentives and consequences for the progress of students, teachers and schools.

To deliver excellent educational opportunities requires excellent teachers, excellent programs and the direct participation by parents in making that happen.

As Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "Education must enable one to sift and weigh evidence, to discern the true from the false, the real from the unreal, and the facts from the fiction."

Let that be a guiding principal in choosing teachers, programs and schools for our children.

**CORRECTION:** In our last newswire we inadvertently misidentified the moving force behind Oregon's McCoy School – potentially Oregon's first charter school. She is Becky Black. We regret the error.

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**CER NEWSWIRE**  
Vol 2, No. 3

January 24, 2000

**Politics and Prose**

With the Iowa caucus at our heels and more attention than ever before being paid to education, it's hard to fathom why some candidates have a hard time taking a stand on education reform.

One of the most recent examples of this is a speech we saw on television that Texas Governor George W. Bush gave in Londonderry, New Hampshire.

Now, a good political handler would have clued in Bush to the fact that he was in the hotbed of New Hampshire's charter wars. You see, a group of local residents have been working for nearly two years to set up a charter school, and the "Live Free or Die" state's law requires several steps of town and state approval before a charter can be approved.

So when Bush was asked what he would do as president about charter schools, his answer (paraphrased below) came off truly inane:

**Bush:** I think if New Hampshire wants charter schools that's great. If a state wants charter schools, they can do that. My state has charter schools, and I really like them.

**THE CORRECT ANSWER WOULD HAVE BEEN:**

Charter schools are a great tool for reform, and the fact that most states have some version of a charter law is terrific. But as President, I'd make sure that any incentive money for charters was focussed on states that allow for a high number of very autonomous charter schools. I'd ensure that federal law affords to charters the same benefits as traditional public schools receive. And I'd hope New Hampshire would change their law to make it easier for groups like those here to start charter schools. Parents and teachers need choices and our schools need higher standards.

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In other news about curriculum-related changes, we were thrilled to learn that more than a huge number of the most troubled elementary schools in Los Angeles, CA, have chosen to implement the increasingly popular Open Court Textbook series to improve their children's reading skills. Schools with Open Court average between ten and twenty point reading gains in the early years of adoption, even for the most disadvantaged children.

Perhaps that's one program that could be purchased with the \$100 million grant that Netscape founder Jim Barksdale recently pledged to help Mississippi children correct their literacy deficiencies.

One hopes that Barksdale's generous commitment to his home state's children will be matched with good advice on what works in reading. Rather than just play catch-up with kids, such commitments of money should be used to completely revamp instruction in reading, and provide for standards that encourage and prod children to meet measurable goals.

**Coming Soon: *Charter Schools Today: Changing the Face of American Education*.** This book brings you up to date on the progress of this burgeoning movement.



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# Center for Education Reform

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**CER NEWSWIRE**  
Vol. 2, No. 4

February 1, 2000

When it comes to trouble in education, few things could compare to the U.S. Department of Education's blatant disregard of a policy that, by now, should have allowed the American people to know how many of the nation's teacher education graduates pass state certification tests. Rather than implement such an important accountability program right away, it turns out that the feds left the rulemaking up to the colleges themselves, and what a surprise!!.... Two years later there's still no data. California Congressman George Miller, the author of this little known provision of a 1998 law has accused the administration of bowing to election year pressures. "College presidents are going to be embarrassed at how poorly their schools of education are doing; some governors are going to be embarrassed," Miller said. "It's a political year and the administration has made a political choice."

So call your Congressman NOW and tell him what you think about this stall. Shouldn't parents have the right to know how the graduates of the nation's teacher training institutions score on these tests? Here you have a perfectly legitimate area for federal oversight and the government can't even handle a little data collecting. This year's buzzword is accountability - for students, teachers, schools and parents. Let's put a little accountability into our tax-funded programs, too!

(For more information about this program, see CER's links to various news articles (AP story from 1/25 AND USA Today 1/31)

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Who says reform is not contagious? A growing number of school superintendents are developing that great American entrepreneurial spirit and jumping on the charter school train. Denver Public Schools chief Chip Zullinger wants to give nine of his schools the chance to convert to charters as a way to raise student achievement and restore more local control over schools.

"I believe the community can offer a big leg up in making things better for children," Zullinger told the *Denver Post*. "I'm looking for new ways to engage them and empower them."

Some months ago, Cincinnati Superintendent Steven Adamowski proposed to charter a bunch of his schools, and his effort became reality the other night when the board of education approved three charters to open. That's not sitting too well with the local AFT union leader, who has also threatened a strike over charters and other issues.

Not all politics is bad for kids. Michigan Governor John Engler is getting touch with his legislature. Engler's proposal to allow more charters to open is being paired with an increase in

school funding. An eye for an eye... though this time charter opponents don't like it when it's done to them!

Engler's New York colleague George Pataki traded legislative raises for charters in late 1998; a move that while criticized, finally allowed charters to come to the Empire State. About 19 will be opened this fall, despite continual opposition from a variety of school board groups and unions statewide.

Hats off to Philly's school board, which is looking into hiring a successful private company to educate some of the system's most disruptive children. Community Education Partners, Inc. currently operates schools for many challenged kids in Texas, and has a great track record in raising their esteem, their standards, and lowering their chances for getting into trouble.



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CER NEWSWIRE  
Vol. 2, No. 5

February 7, 2000

**Quote for the Week:**

"I am not here to warm the seat, I am not a potted plant."

*Interim Acting Schools Chancellor Harold O. Levy, New York City, upon announcing that for the first time the Chancellor would be involved in evaluating district superintendents.*

**Offense or Defense?** Georgia Governor Roy Barnes says eliminating teacher tenure is a key step in improving Georgia schools. Otherwise, he says, parents will demand to have vouchers, and that would cripple public schools.

**The DoE's paternalism takes a lecturing!** The House of Representatives held forth last week on the controversial endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education of ten fuzzy math programs. Experts told Congress that "the programs [chosen] kept children from learning important basic math skills and left them unprepared for higher course work."

A report by the state's Legislative Audit Bureau about the **Milwaukee, Wisconsin** Parental Choice program says that despite fears of creaming and segregation, choice is serving a population that is identical to the Milwaukee Public Schools. Most parents surveyed (71.1%) chose their private school because they believed it would provide higher educational standards. Other popular reasons for making the choice: good teachers (70.4%) and safe and orderly classrooms (67.8%). The report also notes that choice schools are located all over the city and have a wide range of religious and non-religious programs. Many schools participating in the program have well-established reputations for providing high-quality academic programs and that most use some form of standardized testing or are independently accredited. "On the other hand," the report states, "there have been questions about the quality of programs in a small number of participating private schools." According to the audit, nine schools serving 366 choice pupils had no accreditation, were not seeking accreditation and administered no standardized tests.

The chance for choice provides the impetus to improve **Florida's** schools. The FCATs, which help determine a school's grade under Gov. Jeb Bush's "A-Plus" plan, start in two weeks. Forest Park received an F on the test last year, meaning students failed the reading, writing and math portions; a second F could make students eligible for vouchers to private schools. "We are anxious, but more confident than last year," fifth-grade teacher Nina Lant said. "We are much more prepared than we ever have been." Fourth- and fifth-graders at Forest Park practice for the FCAT for 1-1/2 hours each day. Fourth-graders are tested in reading and writing; fifth-graders are tested in math. Eighth- and tenth-graders will take statewide exams in mid-February. Thanks to extra money that the A+ program provided, Forest Park staffers have taken additional steps to improve student performance.



Another state is finally exercising due diligence in cracking down on failed public schools. **Maryland**, which since 1994 has had the ability to take over failing schools, has agreed to take over the state's three worst elementary schools. The State Board of Education has found three possible private groups to replace the current administrators as the schools' management team. They are: Edison Schools, Inc., Mosaica Education, Inc. and the Kennedy-Krieger Institute. These companies would sign contracts and, unlike their predecessors, would have to demonstrate success to stay in control. The local teachers union plans to challenge the action.

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## CER NEWSWIRE Vol. 2, No. 6

February 16, 2000

The Ultimate Ripple comes in Breaking News from Inkster, Michigan: The community plagued by a 20 year decline in enrollment and poor educational results (which was also the subject of a U.S. News & World Report news article late last year) is finding itself both the victim and beneficiary of competition in education. Because of years of educational failure, Inkster's first charter schools attracted thousands of children, causing them instant financial stress when parents took their business elsewhere. Rather than face a state takeover, Inkster's school board voted February 15 to hire the Edison Schools to manage its district and will have the ability to reconstitute entire staffs.

On one hand, it's sad that it took the advent of charter schools for the district to recognize that if you gave people a way out, they'd take it. On the other hand, Inkster school officials should be commended for boldly going where few folks have.

One would wish such revolution would make its way to Washington State, where for several days lawmakers have been engaged in an effort for the fifth year in a row to bring about charter schools. The effort picked up steam last week when former Microsoft partner Paul Allen took an active role as a concerned business leader and had several representatives helping to lobby for the new program. Unfortunately, the Washington Education Association won out in the end, and just yesterday, the bill died for failing to come to a vote in the full House prior to 5 pm, a parliamentary procedure that only the unions and other vested interests knew enough to bank on.

Charter school skeptics, there need look no further than three amazing publications on charter schools all released in the same month! The Center is proud to announce the release of *Charter Schools Today: Changing the Face of American Education*, which is a comprehensive report with hard data on a variety of factors. Scholar Chester E. Finn, Jr. authored *Charter Schools in Action: Renewing Public Education* (available soon), along with Bruno Manno and Greg Vanourek; and the US Department of Education has released its 4th year report, *The State of Charter Schools 2000*, that its own research team has been compiling. For information on obtaining any of these, see [www.edreform.com](http://www.edreform.com).

Florida's choice program is being evaluated not for its effects on improving public education in the Sunshine State, but on whether the program technically works with current constitutional law. That was the premise for the Tallahassee trial court judge's rejection of an amicus brief sponsored by CER on behalf of national choice groups. The brief provides evidence that choice positively impacts the delivery of public education while simultaneously helping provide needed alternatives. The judge held open the possibility that the amicus may be used in later hearings.

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## CER NEWSWIRE Vol. 2, No. 7

February 23, 2000

The **Vaughn Next Century Charter** school is truly the "little school that could." Now it will be the "bigger school that can do more." Vaughn has experience in rejuvenating communities and is currently building a new center to house middle school students which will aid in easing overcrowding in the greater Los Angeles school district. They've also celebrated the addition of a health and community center and new library over the last few years. "We figured out a way to build new schools faster, cheaper and better," Vaughn Principal Yvonne Chan told the *LA Times*. "We built one building and then started digging for another."

Teacher tenure is on the ropes in **Georgia**. Governor Roy Barnes is attempting to move a bill through the Senate (it already passed the House) to remove the kind of iron-clad job protection that is unique to the teaching profession. Rather, the bill will allow local principals to work with teachers to evaluate and reward them as professionals for their accomplishments. Some in Georgia would prefer the Governor focus almost exclusively on amending the state's charter school law, which done the right way, allows such performance-based appraisals and more. That kind of competition might spark the traditional schools to follow suit, and be less costly and more likely to occur than a bill that requires the consent of a union-backed legislature.

According to the Associated Press, nine mathematicians who helped create new state guidelines for the **Massachusetts** Comprehensive Assessment System resigned from the state's Mathematics Curriculum Framework Revision Panel last week, saying the Department of Education has ignored their concerns over curriculum revisions. The panel submitted their guidelines for public comment in September and it created more response than any other framework since the 1993 Education Reform Act. The state department then reworked the guidelines, which prompted this decision.

Some **Denver** leaders took umbrage with the *CER Newswire* of February 1<sup>st</sup>, which applauded Denver Superintendent Chip Zullinger for having the foresight to start his own charter schools. In reality, Zullinger is using the "charter" label to his advantage. Denver Public Schools (DPS) would still control them and they would still be under most DPS guidelines. These schools would simply give the district a place to dump their worst off kids, while allowing the district to claim they embrace charters. Let's hope that's simply an opinion, and not reality.

A comment on Election 2000 politics: Whether one be left, right or center, it's hard to excuse the comments of **New York** Senate Candidate Hillary Rodham Clinton, who astonished even the *New Yorker Magazine* by her statement that:

"I think that the real issue ought to be who cares about the children of New York City, and who will work day in and day out to advance the interests of the education system."

The problem? Reformers argue that the interests of the system and the children are most often NOT compatible. Then again, someone who has keynoted to thunderous applause the

conventions of the National PTA, the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers may not always be pressed to focus on children first. Let's hope for evidence to the contrary.

In other news, the private company TesseracT, formerly known as EAI, was "de-listed" from the stock market because its assets fell below accepted minimums. TesseracT acquired several different educational ventures over the last few years, but never earned a significant share of the charter school movement (it operates about 15 schools) after it's problems in Baltimore and Hartford some years back. It plans to do some restructuring, but it's unclear whether all of its programs will continue. Not all companies are good and not all organizations can operate public school ventures well. The private sector is an outside arbiter of financial viability that can help the public sector gauge the likely success of companies. We're glad for this lesson in accountability.

Yesterday, **Eduventures.com**, Inc. announced that it had purchased the highly regarded *Education Industry Report* from founder John McLaughlin, who will continue to consult and advice industry executives about the changing landscape in K-12 education.

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## CER NEWSWIRE Vol. 2, No. 8

February 29, 2000

- Kudos to **Philadelphia's** Universal Institute Charter School and its founder Kenny Gamble, a well-known song writer who has banded together a group of old friends to revitalize the depressed south Philly neighborhood where he grew up. The Universal Charter School services 300 K-8 children with a very charter like mix of academics and partnerships with cultural institutions. About the school and its part in helping the neighborhood, Gamble's partner told the Philly *Inquirer*, "This is a comprehensive approach to redevelopment, and that means adults and children equipped with the skills to go beyond the norm. The goal is to challenge the status quo, to use the resources within the community to rebuild it, family by family."
- On Thursday, February 24, oral arguments were heard in the Leon County Circuit Court, about the **Florida** school choice program. The court heard arguments about "whether, under Florida's constitution, public funds may be used under any circumstances for private schools," according to the Institute for Justice (IJ). Says IJ, "The argument did not go well, despite the fact that the plaintiffs could not cite a single instance of any court in the nation ruling in the manner they sought. Nor did the judge seem concerned that such a ruling would imperil programs for disabled students, at risk students, and others, at least 8,600 of whom PRESENTLY attend private schools in Florida at an expense in excess of \$46 million."

What IJ points out is not new. Long before Milwaukee had an official school choice program, the public schools there were contracting with private religious schools to educate some of their hardest to educate children. That practice continues to this day.

Throughout the nation, public schools are working in healthy relationships with private institutions to deliver vital educational, health, and other services. The irony is that the plaintiffs in the Florida case apparently believe its OK to have such arrangements as long as it's the school and not the family making the choice as to who leaves and who stays in their assigned school.

- In politics this week: A self-described, **North Carolina** "Soccer Mama" in tennis shoes is running for the state assembly, arguing that "parents deserve a choice and children deserve a chance." Candidate Teresa Mason is the spokeswoman for Women in Solidarity, a grassroots multiracial coalition of women fighting for parental school choice. She's a lifelong Democrat who knows the benefits of choice from her own experience. Her children have been fortunate enough to get scholarships to allow them to attend a school more consistent with the family's values.

Mason's views are reflected in the latest poll by the Joint Center for Economic and Political Studies, which found that by a margin of 34% to 24%, more blacks than whites see their schools as getting worse.

- If you haven't ordered your copy of *Charter Schools TODAY: Changing the Face of American Education*, you can do so by calling (800) 521-2118 or you can purchase it directly via the Eduventures.com marketplace! Excerpts are posted on CER's award winning website at [www.edreform.com](http://www.edreform.com).

Thanks for tuning into the CER Newswire this week!

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## CER NEWSWIRE Vol. 2, No. 9

March 8, 2000

- O.K! Breaking news from **Oklahoma** where the state's first charter school was approved late Monday. The proposal by *Parents for a New Middle School* was approved by the school board, and three other charters are expected to be approved. Congratulations to school reformer and dentist Janet Barisse, who led the charge to bring about the law and is part of the new charter school's founding board.
- Developments in **Florida's** school choice case! The judge presiding in the recent hearing about whether or not Opportunity Scholarships are inconsistent with the state's mandate to provide a sound public education for children, has been asked to disqualify himself from the case.

The Institute for Justice said that Leon County Circuit Court Judge L. Ralph Smith's son is engaged to the daughter of a high-ranking official of the Florida Education Association/United, AFT AFL-CIO, Jack Carbone. The FEA is lead plaintiff in one of the lawsuits seeking to enjoin Opportunity Scholarships. Carbone heads the training/leadership and organizational development programs of the FEA. Smith was also the judge who grilled lawyers defending the choice program but didn't have a single question of the plaintiffs. Says IJ, "We are hopeful that Judge Smith will recuse himself so there is no hint of impropriety in the proceedings in this very important case."

- Choice is helping young children in the **Washington, DC** scholarship program do better academically, according to a report by Harvard researcher Paul Peterson. The study showed that the earlier children are exposed to a quality education environment, the better they will do. The study tracked Washington, DC children who were selected to receive vouchers from the Washington Scholarship Fund and found those who took these vouchers to private schools in grades 2-5, outscored their public school counterparts. However, the study did find that WSF students entering private school in grades 6-8 scored lower than public school students and were less happy with their school.
- **Colorado's** charter schools rock!, according to the state's most recent test scores. Scores on the Colorado Student Assessment Program tests were the highest among the state's charter schools. According to the *Denver Rocky Mountain News*, "two thirds to three quarters of charters also outperformed average test scores of their home school districts and schools with similar demographics." One study highlight found that 77% of third grade students in charter schools tested proficient or above in reading, compared to the state average of 67 percent.

- Kudos to **Boston's City on a Hill** charter school, which was unanimously renewed for another five years! The state determined that *City on a Hill* had been a success, and has built an effective secondary school program that responds well to student's needs. This year, *City on a Hill* enrolled freshmen that are further behind academically than ever before. Reading and math scores for entering freshmen average at the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade level, respectively. And they'll have to pass the state's assessment in just a few short years. This school, founded by two committed public school teachers has our best wishes for continued success!

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**CER NEWSWIRE**  
**Vol. 2, No. 10**

**March 14, 2000**

Circuit Judge L. Ralph Smith ruled Tuesday that the program authorizing Florida's Opportunity Scholarships is unconstitutional.

The judge's argument against vouchers was based solely on his interpretation that the state's constitution is violated by spending public dollars on private schools and further violates the separation of church and state when vouchers are used for parochial school attendance. Children currently enrolled in the program may finish out the year.

According to the Institute of Justice: the Judge's opinion was almost verbatim from a proposed order submitted by the plaintiffs. "Given that the unions essentially authored this opinion, it is about as bad and as self-serving as it gets," said Clint Bolick, IJ's Litigation Director.

The nation's first state-wide choice program was designed to serve as a money back guarantee to parents whose children are trapped in failing schools. This year students in two Florida schools were eligible and nearly 60 students took advantage of Opportunity Scholarships. Next year it was anticipated that up to 60,000 Florida children would have the option to escape failing schools and elect to go to a school of their choice.

The judge's ruling sparks a number of questions about the fate of more than 8,000 Florida families whose disabled and at-risk children currently attend religious schools at state expense. The ruling appears to threaten their future as well.

This year, the Florida Department of Children and Family Services will spend \$46 million for social work performed by Catholic, Baptist, Jewish, Lutheran and other faith-based organizations. Religious institutions are also funded by the state to administer juvenile justice programs.

The Opportunity Scholarships had already started making waves in Florida and had sparked a number of improvements and created innovations in schools that had previously been rated as "F" or "D."

While a blow to choice activists, it's clear this case is going up the court ladder, and possibly end up on the U.S. Supreme Court. For more information, check out CER's website at [www.edreform.com](http://www.edreform.com) or IJ's at [www.ij.org](http://www.ij.org).

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CER NEWSWIRE  
Vol. 2, No. 11

March 22, 2000

- Kudos to the **Association for Educators in Private Practice (AEPP)** which is celebrating its tenth anniversary this year. AEPP is the organization that serves as an advocate for educators who also see themselves as business people, providing much needed options for education and holding themselves accountable for their entrepreneurial work. It's one of the most vibrant and enterprising reform-minded groups around. If you want to know what it's all about, check out [www.aepp.org](http://www.aepp.org).
- Speaking of teachers, the organization **A+PEL (Associated Professional Educators of Louisiana)** advocates a business-like approach to teacher pay. Says A+PEL's director and professional educator Polly Broussard, "Politicians should ponder the question of how to pay teachers in the same way other professionals are paid: by a wage market tied to competencies and demand. Architects, lawyers, nurses, engineers choose among several options to practice their profession. Other professionals can be employed by organizations, they can work with other colleagues in private practice or they can remain independent and work for themselves in an individual practice... Schoolteachers do not have any of these options unless they are willing to leave the classroom... Why not contract for instruction in a similar way? Teaching must become competitive with other professional careers."
- The approved conversion of the **Washington, DC**-based school Paul Junior High from a traditional to a charter school has drawn ire, not only from the superintendent and company, but now, four of the Board of Trustees for D.C. Public Schools have resigned over the Control Board's support of the conversion. The former trustees contend that they can't work in a system where decisions are made that they feel is at odds with what they are trying to do. What was that saying?... Pride goeth before the fall....

With so much confusion in DC, it's no surprise that the quality of DC's charter school application for federal start up funds is the worst among all the applications the U.S. Department of Education received, according to the DC Public Charter School Coalition. The quality may have had an impact on how much the DC charters receive.

- And among the public school leaders who are making a real difference, the principal of an inner city **California** based school, which stands out among its peers, is being duly recognized. Nancy Ichinaga of Bennett-Kew Elementary in Inglewood was appointed to the California State Board of Education. Ichinaga took control of the school and instituted direct instructional practices. As a result, this year Bennett-Kew third graders averaged in the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile in math on the Stanford 9.

- Last week's circuit court decision in **Florida** is getting a lot of news, especially with NEA president Bob Chase's proclamation that the decision "drives a stake in the heart" of the voucher movement. Not so, says national civil rights leader Howard Fuller, who says to Chase, "The voucher movement hasn't skipped a beat. It is strong. . .The issue remains clear, it is unacceptable to deny low-income parents, mostly of color, the power to choose where their children attend school."
- Finally, beginning this week, **PBS** will air a documentary on school choice: "*Education – A Public Right Gone Wrong*." The program provides a discussion on major school choice options available to many American parents, charter schools, private scholarships and vouchers – it offers comments from policy experts and community leaders from both sides of the debate. Check your local listings for times and availability.

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**CER NEWSWIRE**  
Vol. 2, No. 12

March 29, 2000

- **Arizona** education leaders are working to bring about more parity in educational funding in the Grand Canyon State. Governor Jane Hull, State Superintendent Lisa Keegan and a group of lawmakers have announced their intention to place a measure on the November ballot that would generate more than \$400 million for K-12 schooling, including charter schools. The average per-pupil expenditure in Arizona currently stands at \$4,800, which is less than the \$6,600 national average.
- Many colleges and universities around the country have been getting into education reform. Some have sponsored charter schools, some are the actual authorizers of such schools, and others as notable as **Harvard** and **Princeton** have programs designed to research and assess the status of reform developments, including charter schools and school choice. Now, one is getting into the supplementary schooling business. **Dickinson College** in Carlisle, PA has announced that it will be the first to operate a Sylvan Learning franchise. No doubt this will provide college officials a good glimpse of their community's needs as well as allow them to significantly contribute to getting students the help they need.
- Interesting poll results from **Zogby International** about the public's feelings on some reform issues: When asked whether they agree with allowing states to set mandatory student testing and raise standards for graduation, 58.9 percent of the public responded positively. The public also believes that the goal of Head Start should be to lay the groundwork for reading and writing (64%) versus teaching children social skills (29.9%). Unfortunately, Head Start is doing mostly the latter. The poll is part of its American Values Survey, sponsored with the O'Leary Report.
- In a Congressional hearing where the theme was "let bygones be bygones," DC officials were grilled about their involvement and interest in charter schools. DC Charter School Board Chair Josephine Baker testified that **Paul Junior High** students were told they wouldn't be allowed to attend the new charter. Other misinformation about the conversion her board approved was rampant. Virginia Congressman Jim Moran voiced his support for the conversion, but urged both groups to learn to get along. Time will tell.
- **Florida** Governor Jeb Bush, on behalf of the state law authorizing the A-plus scholarships, filed an appeal which suspends the ruling of Judge Ralph Smith that would prevent the choice program from continuing. However, there is still time for the plaintiffs in the case (unions, etc) to file an injunction again. The issue of whether or not children may continue to attend schools of choice and whether other children in failing schools will be permitted to choose schools other than the one that they attend

- by virtue of their home, has begun its long journey through the courts. Maybe school choice will finally make Court TV!
  - It's not too late to order your copy of *Charter Schools Today: Changing the Face of American Education*. Contact the Center today!
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- **CHARTER SCHOOLS:** Charters made big news last week with visits by presidential candidate George Bush to New Jersey's acclaimed Northstar Charter School in Newark and a similar tour to choice schools in Milwaukee. Northstar Charter director Norm Atkins made sure that his visit from Bush and New Jersey Governor Whitman had lasting impact: they both heard about the need for solutions to charter school funding inequities and facilities, and both promised to work to resolve these issues.

A recent study on charter schools in Pennsylvania revealed high margins of support by parents and students, but concerns by teachers that the charter experience was less positive than their initial expectations.

- **TEACHER QUALITY:** Good news for people concerned with the issues surrounding teacher recruitment and quality: The Thomas B. Fordham Foundation has begun the Teacher Quality Bulletin, a weekly electronic update on teacher-related issues. The first TQ Bulletin offered this pearl:

#### CHARTER TEACH MATCHES COLLEGE GRADS WITH CHARTER SCHOOLS

...Charter Teach Organization, which connects accomplished and motivated college graduates with jobs in charter schools, steering recent grads through emergency credentialing and providing them personalized on-the-job training. Charter schools offer innovative opportunities for staffing schools and Charter Teach will hopefully draw in smart, driven candidates who might not otherwise go into teaching. For more information, see: [www.charterteach.org](http://www.charterteach.org).

- **TESTING:** What's it all about, Alfie? It looks like some anti-testers are having influence on Capitol Hill. According to the Chronicle of Higher Education, "States would effectively be prohibited from using high-school graduation tests under legislation introduced Tuesday by two Democratic members of Congress. The measure would bar states and school districts that receive federal funds under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act from relying on any one standardized test in making decisions related to the graduation, promotion, tracking, or grouping by ability of students. Sen. Paul D. Wellstone of Minnesota offered the Senate version of the bill, while Rep. Robert C. Scott of Virginia is sponsoring a companion measure in the House."

Individuals such as author Alfie Kohn have long suggested that testing is anathema to what school is all about. While not all tests are created equal, the idea that we should set standards, measure and account for those standards in order to promote children is a concept whose time is long overdue. Those who oppose this concept are denying children the benefit of a real education, and destining them to failure — although with Kohn's prescription, they might feel pretty good about their failure.

- **REPORT CARDS:** States like Colorado are finally beginning to measure children, rather than retreat as the federal legislators above would have them do. Governor Bill Owens pushed through a new education reform package that will evaluate school progress with report cards much the way individual children are graded. Children in grades 3 through 10 will take the Colorado state test in reading, writing, science and math. Schools will receive report cards and consistently failing schools can be made, subject to bidding by contractors, for conversion to charter schools. Local school boards of failing schools will be given three years to develop improvement plan, including, if they choose, conversion to charters.
- **CHOICE:** Some disadvantaged children in Chattanooga, Tennessee did not have to wait for their state to adopt report cards to get a better education. A survey of parents of the 500 children served by the CEO Foundation of Chattanooga found that 54% of children had improved their academic performance, and 63% of parents were very satisfied with the education their child was receiving. Children are also happier in their present school, and their behavior, when compared to their previous experience, has improved.
- \* And when teachers exercise choice, they are clear why they are making that choice. California Assembly Speaker Antoinia Villaraigosa (D-Los Angeles) said the following in explaining why he and his public school teacher wife are considering placing two of their children in private school "As a parent, no matter how passionate you are about public schools, in the final analysis you're going to do what's best for your children." Villaraigosa was one of the speakers who addressed the NEA Representative Assembly in Orlando last year.

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