

# THE Center for Education Reform



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## "SCHOOL REFORM HANDBOOK IS IMMEDIATE SUCCESS AS REFORM EFFORTS SPREAD NATIONWIDE"

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) -- An attractive and readable guide to innovative ways of reforming America's troubled public school systems has quickly become an indispensable "road map" for frustrated parents and grass roots activists nationwide, according to the Center for Education Reform (CER).

*"The School Reform Handbook,"* (subtitled *"How to Improve Your Schools"*) was written by CER President Jeanne Allen, with Angela Dale. It is a lively, readable 155 page guide to everything from "Models for School Reform" to "The Myths and Realities of School Reform" to an exhaustive guide to "Who's in Charge: The Educational Establishment."

The Center for Education Reform has been a key resource to activists nationwide, and is now arming these activists with an initial run of 20,000 copies of *The School Reform Handbook*, presenting the education establishment with a major challenge to "business as usual."

"We build a critically important bridge between policy and practice," said CER President Jeanne Allen. "Since 1993, we've been the first stop on the road to reform for thousands of civic groups, legislators and grassroots activists looking for advice, consultation and help in making their way through the thicket of obstacles to improving our children's schools."

Now we've come up with a book that draws together, in one handy guide, all of the essential knowledge that education reformers need, whether they're parents, elected officials or teachers frustrated with the hidebound education establishment themselves."

In *The School Reform Handbook*, Allen cautions would-be reformers that they've got a lot of work ahead of them, even when it comes to very basic preparation, like finding out how their local schools are performing:

If test results are even made available, then too often they are at best misleading, or at worst, completely unintelligible...test scores alone don't tell us the whole picture, partly because they tell us very little about what our children actually know and partly because there are other important factors, [such as] dropout rates, graduation rates, college enrollment rates, number of advance placement courses offered, number of remedial courses offered, [etc.]."

Allen also notes that opponents of reform will always hold the upper hand, unless and until reformers become as well informed as they are:

"Information is power. As with any business or private venture, information is critical to the success of any reform effort. Too often people overlook the complexity of education, from who's in control to what's actually happening in the schools. It is imperative to have information well in hand as you begin to make decisions about how and where to approach reform."

Is money the answer to the most pressing problems in America's troubled school system? Allen says you may find you need a new dictionary as you get deeper into this debate:

"When the education establishment talks about inputs, they're talking about money. But inputs, that is, things that cost money, are no guarantee of outputs, that is, how students do."

"There are impoverished schools that shine and affluent schools that do not. The effectiveness of a good school is largely the result of its parents, teachers and students who have control over their education process, and who every day exercise a choice to participate in and contribute to that process."

The *Handbook's* list of recommended "Do's and Don'ts" are designed to help activists maximize their influence and keep them on track:

"DO explain clearly and concisely just what the numbers mean. DON'T get bogged down in too many numbers and statistics. DON'T use jargon. DON'T try to change the world (all at once). DO plan to reach out to all civic groups, school leaders and other pertinent members of your community."

And Allen offers sage advice when it comes to public school teachers:

"Rank and file teachers realize the opportunities that school reform will give them and students. They are sometimes the most effective champions of new approaches, despite their affiliation with unions opposed to change."

Community and state-based school reform drives have spread like wildfire in recent months. For instance:

- \* In **Texas**, the State Senate approved a bill authorizing a school choice program in 20 school districts.
- \* In **Illinois** and **Ohio**, State Senates voted to launch a limited school choice experiment for inner city school children.
- \* In **Connecticut** and **New Hampshire**, State Senates have passed charter school bills.
- \* Legislators in **New Jersey** heard testimony on a proposed charter school bill.
- \* In **Pennsylvania**, Governor Tom Ridge has proposed a bill that authorizes charter schools and a school choice program.

In all of these states and many more, CER has provided vital information resources to groups and individuals working for reform about similar efforts nationwide, "cross fertilizing" successful projects and campaigns from coast to coast. *The School Reform Handbook* is the latest, and one of the most potent tools for people working for better schools everywhere in America.

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