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**RENAISSANCE 2010:
LEGISLATIVE STRATEGY, MESSAGING AND
IMPLEMENTATION PROPOSAL**

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The Center for Education Reform, established in 1993, is the nation's premiere leadership group for school reform, with a unique talent for communications and a special appreciation for grassroots advocacy necessary to secure widespread school improvement. The Center for Education Reform (CER) drives the creation of better educational opportunities for all children by leading parents, policymakers and the media in boldly advocating for school choice, advancing the charter school movement, and challenging the education establishment. Through its storehouse of data and unique insights into American communities, CER uses information to turn parents into activists, policymakers into advocates, and educators into reform leaders. CER changes laws, minds and cultures to allow good schools to flourish.

Since 1998, when the Center for Education Reform formally launched its "Target States Initiative," CER has supported states where the opportunity to improve the climate for school reform was greatest. Our work has added great value to home grown initiatives and state leadership. In addition to making a full assessment of the environment for (or against) school reform in each state, the Center is expert in communications critical to engaging the media, policymakers and the grassroots to forge a common understanding of challenges, opportunities and potential solutions.

It was with this background that CER began work in each of its initial five target states: California, Michigan, Arizona, Indiana and the District of Columbia. CER contributed heavily to the development of plans that gave rise to high quality organizations serving the policy making community in each state. Several additional states have sought CER's services, and since our initial foray into capacity building, support has been brought to core leadership teams in Texas, New Mexico, Missouri, New Jersey, Louisiana, Tennessee, Connecticut, Florida and South Carolina.

Today, CER has developed a set of tangible, strategic and highly regarded programs that transcend state differences. These programs can significantly impact the development of messaging and support among increasingly sophisticated constituencies for school choice options and general reform issues.



A PROPOSAL TO INCREASE EDUCATIONAL REFORM SUPPORT

In most cases, the reason that political solutions involving school choice have not made it past a legislator's introduction to becoming accepted, is because the idea must be well sold to the public and the consequence to legislators for failing to accept such proposals must be negative.

Most school choice efforts in the past and from around the country have been led by individuals and groups whose political clout and base is narrow and easy to contort. Even though school choice in its most controversial forms enjoys support from among a "tri-partisan" electorate, and transcends race and religious distinctions, the current political appetite is thin. If only a small, narrow group of policymakers works to advance an issue, then it is easy to dismiss it. If the only vocal supporters of an issue are traditionally associated with groups considered (however wrong) anti-public education, it will be difficult to change the perception that support is shallow. If you like an issue but do not respect the persons who most vocally advocate, then your support for that issue becomes secondary to your attitudes.

This is the conclusion of our work in the states, and it is the conclusion that has informed successful campaigns for reform. For example:

Florida: When Jeb Bush ran for Governor of Florida successfully on his second try in 2000, he advocated forcefully for an education agenda that appealed to most voters, and laid the groundwork for a successful legislative agenda over the next two years. He articulated that Florida had a resource problem (money) and that teachers needed our support. However, he advocated at the same time for renewed accountability that would allow more money to flow to pockets of excellence, and allow parents to make fundamental decisions for their children's education.

Such themes resonated then, and they resonate now, particularly in states where bedrock cultural values remain. Parents in charge, hard work, respect for teachers.

In the ensuing two years following his election, Governor Bush traveled every county and city in Florida, and each time, regardless of the issue, he talked about his education agenda. On the ground, he maintained tight control on advocates. He worked to ensure that no one was off message, and while inviting their participation, he made it clear that he was driving the agenda. He succeeded, and the success – vouchers, accountability, new charters – has had an impact to this day. While the publicly funded voucher program was struck down by the courts, the special needs scholarship remains in place, actively supporting tens of thousands of children who need additional support. Bush had the help of several urban, black leaders during his effort. One, the head of the Miami Urban League, is today the head of the FL State Board of Education. T. Willard Fair's contribution was critical and he was a partner, not a member of the audience, during the Bush "education campaign."

Washington, DC: A similar scenario played out in Washington, DC, where then President George Bush forged a unique relationship in 2003 with then DC Mayor Anthony Williams. The support they garnered among the leader of the City Council education committee, business leaders, and a handful of prominent Congressional democrats led to the victory of the DC Scholarship program, as well as continued



support for the city's charters. That coalition is also helping to keep alive the more recent efforts by the city's new schools chancellor to institute a performance pay effort for teachers, against union preferences.

Ohio is another state where a tightly controlled, well-messaged effort led to reform success. In this case, the recent effort was to defend the state's robust charter movement against a Governor, press and many legislators of both parties seeking to shut down most of the state's choice programs (which had similarly been won years before with a coalition and effort not unlike that of Florida). Then Speaker of the House Jon Husted saw a disparate group of organizations from inside and outside of the state conflicting and fighting to be in control of the effort to challenge the proposed cuts. Husted organized a meeting with all those parties with CER's assistance. He made it clear that we work together, and that he expected one air-traffic controller to lead the effort and others to follow. Husted requested both air and ground cover – and remained involved through a three-month effort. At the end, the Governor withdrew his budget proposal as the response of parents, citizens and in general the huge numbers of people who rallied convinced them that his movement was not one he could bully. Ohio shows that in the absence of a Governor, a strong legislator can have the same impact, as long as he is joined by an equally impressive private sector counterpart.

CER will create a model legislative effort that advocates for the support, guidance, leadership and legislation necessary to secure agreed upon goals. This will involve the steps outlined as follows:

EVALUATION OF CAPABILITIES AND POTENTIAL

CER will, in partnership with key local leaders, make an objective assessment of the current state of charter school reform in Illinois, including a vetting of legislative history, regulatory and legal proposals necessary to ensure no other harm comes to charters in this process. With the goal in mind to grow charter schools (lifting the cap) and keeping schools free from union control, this will entail the following:

- Formal survey of previous and proposed reform efforts
- Review of existing state laws/regulations
- Interview of key stakeholders
- Analysis of external perceptions (i.e., media)

CER has developed tools to support this phase, including a survey instrument and a blueprint that documents best practices legislation in the states. Using national models as a gauge, CER will develop a complete assessment that benchmarks efforts made against successful efforts in other states.

I. Legislative Strategy Plan and Messaging Implementation

Most people who are in the policymaking business – from state government officials to legislators – are constrained by their own idea of what school choice is – and how it can/cannot help Illinois. While it's clear the opponents want no part of it, they do not necessarily represent the majority. Indeed, surveys from other states tell us that the vast majority of people do not know enough to love or hate education reform. Barely 20 percent can define what a charter school is, and the remaining do not even want to venture a guess. That provides both challenges and opportunities.



Using the results of our evaluation – which will be shared with all identified parties – CER will map out a model plan and legislative strategy for charter school legislation and new messaging based on the components of the Illinois status quo evaluation. We will identify specific laws and legislators whom are potentially winnable, and use this to tailor a plan – and timeline – for activity in the immediate future. We would also be prepared to brief key supporters on our rationale for the plan that Renaissance 2010 will lead. The plan would include:

- A model legislation proposal
- Legislative Advocacy and Messaging Activities
- Communications Plan and Branding Approaches
- Recommended additional consultative services (e.g. advertising)
- Proposed budget

Once the analysis is shared with Renaissance 2010 leadership, a detailed plan can be developed to take the legislative effort to the next level and operationalize communications for a completely persuasive mission.

Working quickly and with the campaign plan in hand, CER will facilitate a working session in Illinois that reviews the assets and challenges identified and the goals established. Decisions made based upon this meeting, in turn, will inform final collaterals and publications keyed off of critical message elements and hot button language.

II. Deliverables and Timeframe

CER has fifteen years' experience in increasing the public's awareness of and support for educational reform and will lend its best practices to the partner community's efforts. CER is the leader in media, messaging and effective communications strategies supporting today's education reform and charter school movement.

The plan - as noted above - will be a framework for both legislative, messaging and implementation strategies that support and advance charter schools in Chicago and Illinois. The plan will be clear in its goal of ensuring the adoption of new, positive and persuasive messages focused on the issues and audiences critical to passage of desired legislation including targeted audience, communication tools, recommended scripts and statements, practiced approaches and polished collateral materials.

CER will create a grassroots message and brand intersection recommendation suitable for delivering consistent meaning to the community and legislators alike. CER will propose an additional program to create and disperse subliminal messages throughout the communities of interest important for adoption of new charter school reform in Illinois. Additionally, CER will help and advise in the acquisition of professional service providers expert in education reform and specialty services such as paid advertising, brand intersection, polling, focus groups and other key professionals with the experience and qualifications such that they can assist our core leadership in the final delivery of services. This effort will take 3-4 weeks to complete, upon approval and incorporate the following:



Legislator Education and Advocacy: Getting to know every legislator – and what makes them tick – is part and parcel of any successful effort. While ultimately the campaign must choose its partners and work to support their leadership in securing our legislative goals, we must first understand who they are and work to build bridges where possible with non-traditional supporters. To do this, the campaign must initiate a major research effort that pulls together information for each legislator, such as background, affiliations, voting records, professional and personal interests. With this information, a strategy will be created for each legislator that identifies how best to approach them, events at which they may be influenced, relationships that may help us in our efforts, and potential political support that may move them in the right direction – or at least neutralize them.

Earned and Paid Media Communications: The media recommendations will involve mapping out the reach of each outlet, and identifying opportunities to engage reporters, editors and advertising staff as needed. While the focus will be on earned media, we will recommend potential advertising in conjunction with the campaign effort. This will help us hit the state's centers of influence with the right degree of saturation. We will also vet our messages through our media contacts. For example, we will test out themes relating to state achievement. "Did you know that over half our state's schools have failed to meet state minimum standards?" Indeed, most Illini would be chastened to learn that only a fraction of all schools have reached their targets!

New Media Communications: Blog, Twitter, Facebook...the world today revolves around an amalgam of websites that connect you immediately with friends who might live down the street – or down the planet. Young people are being pushed out by an increasing number of adults – parents, interested activists—who seek to find new friends across their community and share their world in ways they'd never done so before. President Obama is the first US president to use the social networking world to secure supporters, mobilize a nation and secure his historic victory. It's sophisticated but easy – there must be messages crafted and messengers tasked. There must be ongoing monitoring of all the work that is relayed about our effort through these networks. Then it grows organically and pushes policymakers to respond.

III. Financial Contribution

CER will devote current staff expertise to this project, but subcontract for any on-the-ground surveys and objective third party evaluations. We would request \$25,000 not inclusive of expenses in support to allow CER to quickly engage in this process and look forward to opportunities to remain involved as needed in the implementation of the plan through its ultimate success in the partner's community.