

# Center for Education Reform

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## FAX ALERT

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## REFORM UPDATE

In several places it's down to the wire for charter schools and choice. We are working hard to see these efforts through. Following is a rundown:

**DC:** The DC Appropriations bill is headed for the Senate. Debate is scheduled for this Tuesday, the 27th, from 10:30 -12:30 with a vote to follow. (Coincidentally, also the day our friends will present oral arguments on Milwaukee's choice program.) The Center is spearheading an effort to bring more than 200 school children and parents to the Capitol for the vote. The children are representative of DC, and currently attend private schools of their choice. By hosting the field trip, we hope to convey the message that there are children thriving in DC private schools, and that a choice should be given to more children. We are working closely with Senators and their staffs to help foster greater understanding of the bill and its implications. We'll let you know the outcome.

**OH:** A strong charter bill, which passed the House last fall, cleared the Senate Education Committee last week with some good amendments. The Governor is committed to seeing the bill passed by the end of the month. With the establishment's heightened awareness these bills are getting more difficult to pass, and some struggles and confusion among legislators have developed as charter opponents have unleashed their forces. We've worked closely with Ohio legislators since the bill's inception, spoken to them personally, and written extensively on the issue. We hope to see a positive resolution.

**PA:** A fairly weak charter bill (allowing school board approvals only) passed the House Education Committee recently and another version is pending in the Senate. There is broad interest in seeing a bill through, but Gov. Ridge has made it clear to legislators and to us that he doesn't want a bill that merely creates a charter law but not charter schools. The fate of the effort is, at this time, uncertain.

**WA:** In response to strong public support for charters, specifically Initiative-177, the legislature has introduced a strong charter law (HB 2910) incorporating many of I-177's components. HB 2910 which survived a strong challenge in committee is set for a vote this Friday, and stands an excellent chance of passing. If it does, Washington could have charters up and running in September. If not, then children will have to wait until the matter is decided by voters in November. (AZ State Superintendent Lisa Graham Keegan's visit to the state, to show how Arizona has enacted a good charter law, drew enormous media attention.)

**MN:** Gov. Arne Carlson and St. Paul Mayor Norm Coleman are asking the St. Paul Board of Education to pilot a charter school and school choice plan to give needy families in the city clear and diverse choices of schools. The unprecedented "Education Opportunity Community" plan, would bring resources and empowerment to families, free the district from most state regulations and give a limited number of families choices among private schools. A school board vote is scheduled for Feb. 27.

We'll keep you updated and provide more details on these and other efforts in our upcoming Monthly Letter to Friends, due out early next month.