



Making Schools Work Better for all Children

Newsire - January 25, 2000

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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 focused 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.

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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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