



Making Schools Work Better for all Children

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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.



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