

CENTER FOR EDUCATION REFORM
EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM AWARDS
RECOGNIZING OUTSTANDING REPORTING ON EDUCATION REFORM ISSUES

Program Review

When we reported on the success of this program last year, we said that "One of the greatest obstacles to achieving education reform and support for reform initiatives is the general public's misconception about proposed reforms and how they would work to benefit children and parents; misconceptions which are often exacerbated by the media's (often unwitting) failure to accurately or completely convey the whole story surrounding the issues entailed in the reform debate."

Thus, The Center for Education Reform's Excellence in Journalism Awards were born in 1995 through a grant from Fieldstead & Company. CER recognizes particularly noteworthy journalistic efforts that thoroughly and fairly address school reform issues and that provide objective, compelling coverage of important events in school reform and their effects on the lives of children and parents.

Offering cash awards in five news and editorial categories, the Center solicited entries from hundreds of newspapers, publications, editors, reporters and writers, nationwide and received a significant response: more than 300 entries from publications ranging from local weekly newspapers, to major metropolitan dailies, to regional and national magazines.

To assess the merit of the entries and select the winners, the Center assembled a distinguished group of journalists, professional educators and school reform leaders. Each panel member reviewed and rated submissions and independently made their choices for the articles that would receive final consideration. Following that winnowing process, all judges participated in a conference call to determine the final winners.

With the process complete, the winners were notified and awarded their prizes at a special conference in Washington, DC on March 21, 1996.

In short, the First Annual Excellence in Journalism Awards proved to be a great success. The articles received for the competition were truly outstanding, and served as much to benefit the education reform community, as the awards served to benefit the writers. Our judges were particularly impressed with both the depth and breadth of the entries and expressed their strong support for the intent and value of the awards. Also, thanks in part to the awards, we are seeing education reform issues move from the lifestyle page of the newspaper to the front page. So, too, we are experiencing first hand, the reporters gratitude and sincere appreciation for the attention and credibility which the program gives to their work. The promotion of the Awards process and its results, has certainly heightened awareness among journalists across the country of the value of "going the extra mile" in providing the public with solid, objective reporting on education reform issues.

As we near the end of the process of the Second Annual Excellence in Journalism Awards we are proud to state that a comparable number of applications has been received this year as compared to last, and they all seem to be of a similar or higher caliber. As we continue to honor the media, we notice an impressive increase in attention and balance regarding education reform. Numerous articles in the *1996 CER News Clip Book* illustrates this progression quite clearly.

Proposal

It is proposed that Fieldstead & Company renew its commitment to CER's Excellence in Journalism Awards for another three years with a grant of \$64,000 for each of the next three years, to make this beneficial program possible, and allow us with confidence to progress into the future.

The Second Annual Excellence in Journalism Awards, following the guidelines established for 1995, will continue to recognize "print journalists who have provided clear, comprehensive and objective coverage of education-reform issues which are making a difference in the lives of children and the quality of schools."

Eligibility includes articles published by commercial newspapers and magazines by professional print reporters and editors, on education reform topics such as standards and testing, accountability, school finance, school choice, privatization, charter schools, state and federal legislation, national education policy, teacher competency, reform activism, etc. The five award categories of Opinion/Editorial, Feature Writing, Hard News, Single-theme Series, and Special/Regular Section or Insert, are being judged by a distinguished and qualified group of panelists, well-known in the Journalism world.

Awards would be equal to those of 1996: \$750 First Place Awards in each of the five categories; up to two, \$250 Honorable Mention Awards in each category, and a \$2,000 Award of Excellence.

We plan a spring new conference and training workshop for journalists. It is our intention to have Steve Forbes do the keynote address.