



Making Schools Work Better for all Children

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* **THANKSGIVING:** We give thanks to the teacher's who have comforted and cared for our children during these last several difficult weeks, for the relentless work of our armed forces and nation's leaders and for the continued attention and hard work of the nation's education reformers. Have a Happy Thanksgiving and Godspeed in your journeys.

* **LEADERSHIP:** Administrators don't like red tape, says a survey by the Public Agenda Foundation. The polling group surveyed principals and superintendents and found that these leaders overwhelmingly want freedom and autonomy, in exchange for being held accountable. The survey also pointed out how difficult it is for leaders to get things done in the school system, with many agreeing that they have to fight or work around the system to accomplish anything. But where are these administrators? The associations that claim to represent them -- such as the American Association of School Administrators and the Principals groups -- shun the kind of autonomy that these rank and file leaders want and lobby against reforms that give states more flexibility. They oppose efforts to consolidate myriad federal programs into fewer programs with more flexibility for administrators. Public Agenda's work is once again a clear indication that many local school leaders do not walk in step with their Washington-based colleagues.

For the Public Agenda Report, go to: www.publicagenda.org

* **The SAT:** The College Board is working overtime to save the SAT from losing it's favor as the primary tool which guides college and university placement. Ever since the University of California president recommended ending the SAT requirement, there's been a public debate about how useful the tool is. While most admissions directors concede that the SAT provides "a common yardstick against which to measure students whose schools may have vastly different criteria for what constitutes an 'A' or a 'C' (NY Times, 11/19/01), the possible decline of the SAT is owed, in part to the this once balanced instrument becoming dumbed down over time, with more time allotted for some sections, difficult sections withdrawn all together, and fewer right answers needed for a perfect score among other things. Thus the College Board's latest PR may not save its lucrative business from the eventual university hatchet.

* **PARENTS:** It's all their fault we're in the education mess we're in, says public employee union president Bob Chase. In a speech last week to the nation's press corp, Chase argued that it's a lack of parent involvement that explains "why we are still coming up short." He didn't say that perhaps parental involvement is lacking because in a majority of schools parents are rebuffed when they attempt to get substantively involved.

One of thousands of notes from parents to CER is illustrative, this one about a school's disregard for parent input into textbook selection. "The Site Council is hand picked and each school in the district has one, though most parents are unaware it exists. It is the 'secret club.' Last year parents were fed up and wanted time at the PTO meeting to discuss, and get answers. This was frowned at. The Site Council disbanded the PTO without notice. Now they are trying to form a PTA, but the stipulation is only for fundraising, so no concerns will be addressed. Of course this again will mean very little parental involvement." Many are outraged that Chase would divert attention from teacher and school deficits to parents. They all may be factors, but it's unfair to single out parents for school failure.

* **CHARTERS:** And speaking of parents, Michigan's charter school association reports that 67% of its charter schools began the school year with waiting lists, thirty of which exceeded 100 students. Total enrollment there soared 13% to 66,451. Parent satisfaction surveys weigh in at over 90%.

2000 NAEP SCIENCE scores for 4th, 8th and 12th graders were released earlier today showing little or no improvement, and in some cases a decline in student achievement from 1996 results. Stay tuned to CER's analysis on the results in next week's Newswire.



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