



*Making Schools Work Better for all Children*

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\* **PHILLY:** With only 13 percent of the city's high school juniors able to read the daily newspaper, Philadelphia will witness a massive overhaul under a plan approved by Pennsylvania Governor Mark Schweiker. Under his plan, the state would take control of the public schools, and give authority to a variety of groups to revamp and manage the 60 worst schools. Edison Schools, Inc., the company hired by the state to forge a restructuring plan, would assume management responsibilities.

Currently, 57 percent of Philly students cannot pass state-mandated math and reading tests.

Much opposition is expected, but many are relieved as well ... More details are forthcoming. This is the biggest reform of a major city school system to ever be proposed, and a model for others to watch.

For more, [click here](#)

For the state's report: [click here](#)

\* **STANDARDS:** Of the two major school employee unions, the American Federation of Teachers has generally been a tougher advocate for standards, and it makes their new report, "Making Standards Matter 2001" worth examining. The report evaluates the clarity and specificity of each state's (and D.C.'s) standards for all grade levels in four core subjects: English, math, science and social studies, and also judges whether states have developed a basic curriculum that is linked to the standards. Finally, it reviews whether state tests in those subjects are aligned to strong standards, whether promotion and graduation policies are based on aligned tests, and whether the state requires and funds assistance for struggling students.

According to the AFT report, only nine states have more than half of the components of a fully-developed curriculum for all four subject areas: Alabama, California, Illinois, Kentucky, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina and Virginia.

To check out your state, you can download the report at: [www.aft.org](http://www.aft.org).

The report contrasts with the views of the National Education Association affiliate in Connecticut, which blasted use of the Connecticut Mastery Test, widely considered to be one of the best student assessment tools in the country. Where the AFT understands the importance of tests aligned with curriculum aligned with standards, the NEA worries about "overemphasizing test-taking skills" and "stifling creativity."

For more, [click here](#)

\* **UNIONS:** The teachers of Island City Academy, a charter school in Michigan, have voted to oust the Michigan Education Association (MEA) as their collective bargaining agent - the first decertification of an MEA local in decades. Prior to the vote, a majority of teachers had publicly complained that "the union is seeking to protect its own agenda and S is causing the district to spend precious resources of time and money that could be used to improve the compensation of teachers or to better meet the classroom instruction needs of students."

\* **CHARTER CONTRASTS:** The contrasting views of two school leaders in California point up the value of having groups other than school boards permitted to authorize charters. Parents in Sequoia Union High School District wanted a school with smaller class sizes, more independence and more encouragement of college preparation than they felt a public school could give, so they proposed a charter school, Summit Prep, that would do just that.

The Sequoia School Board said "No," claiming that "charter schools are intended for students that have difficulties learning - ones that have special needs." Undaunted, the parents turned to Summerville Union High School District, where an open-minded Superintendent, Linda Frost, declared "I think their mission is a good one and people should look at their intent. If people are afraid someone else will be better, then get better and compete."

If more school leaders took Frost's enlightened view, there would indeed be more educational improvement. Unfortunately, too many school boards box themselves into the thinking of the Sequoia Board.

\* **MOM, APPLE PIE AND THE SCHOOLS:** That's the title of a new section on the [CER website](#). We have written there about how we all can make sure that our children are taught the substance of their nation's history, and linked to others whose wisdom is compelling. Over the next several months, we invite you to contribute ideas about how we can have an impact on what children are taught about our nation. As always, we will provide advice to policymakers, educators and parents about how they can make a difference.



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