



Making Schools Work Better for all Children

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* **CHOICE:** Wisconsin Senate Democrats eviscerated the Milwaukee school choice program last week, slashing the program that allows poor students to attend private and charter schools. Their vote would cut the maximum value of the school vouchers in half, and more than 4,000 students in Milwaukee's choice program would not have classrooms to return to in the fall if the plan prevails. The vote was strongly backed by the Wisconsin Education Association Council, which spent \$1 million on Senate campaigns over the last two years.

The pleas of Priscilla Rosario, who just finished 10th grade at St. Joan Antida High School fell on deaf ears: "I'm scared. I pray that they don't take it down at all because that would mean I'd have to leave." The Senate majority, ignoring the fact that education is supposed to be about kids and not the system, instead will force the Priscilla Rosarios of Milwaukee to move back into the traditional public schools their parents felt were inadequate in the first place.

And they will do so at a higher price: The Milwaukee choice budget is about five percent of the total district budget, but educates about 10 percent of the district enrollment. Governor Scott McCallum and State Assembly Republicans are expected to fight against the changes. For more see, www.jsonline.com/news/metro/jun01/choice16061501a.asp.

* **PTA:** The National Parent Teachers Association opens its annual convention this weekend in Baltimore confronted with decreasing membership and its increasing irrelevance for ordinary parents. But instead of re-examining its own positions and practices, the PTA plans to railroad through an 80 percent dues increase to finance a \$7 million public relations campaign.

Parents are increasingly turning to unaffiliated Parent Teacher Organizations, tired of sending their dues money out of their local school to Washington and in disagreement with the national policy positions of the PTA that ignore or hurt children not in traditional public schools. CER has developed 10 questions the press and PTA members should ask the national leadership at their convention. Click here [to view the questions](#).

* **CHOICE, II:** Much has been made of how vouchers and school choice can benefit children, but two new commentaries by educators make the point that vouchers can benefit teachers. Writing in Education Week, Tim DeRoche, a former educational consultant for the Los Angeles public schools notes that choice plans increase the choices available to teachers and spark heated competition for good educators, leading to better pay, more respect and improved working conditions. Much the same point

is made by West Springfield, VA Physics teacher Ed Linz, writing in The Fairfax Journal, who notes that under a voucher plan "... teachers would have opportunities to be monetarily rewarded for classroom excellence. Under the current system, there is no incentive to become a better teacher because pay is in no way related to ... student achievement." Linz concludes that vouchers would not only improve the salaries of good teachers, but "in the process, we just might improve the education of our children." You can read DeRoche's commentary at www.edweek.org , and [Linz' op-ed piece](#).

* **TEACHERS:** Speaking of teachers, Loring Branch, the principal at Theresa B. Lee Academy charter school in Fort Worth, Texas, found a unique way to raise his students standardized test scores: "I got rid of the certified teachers," he says. Last year, none of the school's students passed the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills, and Theresa B. Lee was tied with 10 other schools for the worst performing among Texas public schools. This year, the test results indicate that 50 percent of the school's students passed all tests.

Many of the school's students are at risk of dropping out because of truancy and pregnancy. In seeking new teachers for his staff last year, Branch focused on teachers who were committed and could reach students, rather than checking their paperwork to see if the certification was complete. Those he determined were in it for the long haul - willing, for example, to do extra tutoring for no extra pay - were put on schedule to earn their certification within a year. Branch's focus is on attitude and ability, rather than the certification process, and the results at Theresa B. Lee Academy show it works.

* **CHARTERS:** Two new charter school studies have finally been released by the U.S. Department of Education. They confirm the positive ripple effect that charters have had on traditional public school districts and underscore the difficulty traditional education agencies have in focusing their accountability oversight on compliance with rules rather than on student achievement.

The studies were completed nearly two years ago, and the previous Education Department leadership held them from public release. The American Federation of Teachers instantly attacked the reports as faulty, despite the fact that the authors of one study, RPP International, have done nearly 20 previous charter reports for various agencies. Could these reports have been "spiked" by those in the education establishment concerned about the growth of charters and the accountability they're imposing on the traditional system? Click here to view [CER's comments on the reports](#) . To see the reports themselves, go to: <http://www.ed.gov/News/>.

* And in Georgia, five years of charter school opposition came to an end for the Coweta and Bulloch county School Boards as the state Board of Education approved two charters that spent those years seeking charter status. Under a 2000 law creating an appeals process for those denied local school board approval, the state Board took matters into their own hands and approved charters for the Odyssey Charter School in Coweta and the Charter Conservatory for Liberal Arts and Technology in Bulloch.



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