



Making Schools Work Better for all Children

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* **MATH:** The "Math Wars" continue in Maryland, where that state's latest guidelines for math instruction have come under attack from parents and university mathematicians. The group compared questions on the Maryland Algebra I exam for ninth graders with an algebra exam given in Singapore to fifth graders. Professors W. Stephen Wilson, of Johns Hopkins University and Jerome Dancis, of the University of Maryland reviewed the tests and agreed that the questions were comparable: in Maryland, the algebra exam is grade-school math. Wilson noted that such exams do a disservice to students: "You must know the basic arithmetic operations fast, without thinking. Otherwise, I and my colleagues across the country will flunk them when they try to take fast-paced college math courses."

* **PUBLIC CHOICE:** A shoving match broke out among parents in Memphis last April, as parents in line at the Mid-South Fairgrounds sought to sign their child up for the limited public school choice options available to them. Noting that their children would have been sent to the principal's office for such behavior, the school system met recently to find alternatives, including sign-up sheets and lottery systems. Evidentially left unmentioned was the concept of increasing the choice options and expanding the pedagogy used in the most popular schools.

Resistance to duplicating successful programming is the response in other school districts such as Arlington, Virginia, where the "Arlington Traditional School" uses Core Knowledge, Open Court and Saxon Math to instruct their students. The school has a waiting list of hundreds, but instead of expanding the concept to other schools, the district insists that parents "wait their turn." Memphis school official compared the lines to "buying your license tags." If signing your child up for the best school is like waiting at the Department of Motor Vehicles, no wonder there's a shoving match.

* **CHARTERS:** It's rare that charter school opponents can prevent school formation and eliminate accountability of existing schools with one stroke of the pen, but Missouri Governor Bob Holden has succeeded. He vetoed funding that would have supported a new charter school accountability system and underwritten a monitoring and oversight role over Kansas City and St. Louis charter schools. The veto also prevents new charter schools from being approved (including a union-supported charter high school) and denies further choices to hundreds of Missouri families.

* In INDIANA, local school boards that opposed the new charter school law are remaining true to form by moving slooooooowwwly in drafting the application process for their districts. The Indianapolis School Board is the only board in its county to begin talking about the matter, and is only

now drafting a resolution to screen applicants. It need not be that way, of course: Indianapolis Mayor Bart Peterson, who is empowered to authorize charter schools on his own, unveiled his review process in May, shortly after the law was passed. That's leading potential organizers to skip the school board in Indianapolis and move directly to the mayor's office – but unfortunately, Indianapolis remains the only city where the mayor is so empowered. Charter school organizers in the state can also approach public universities, where the climate may also be more conducive to charters. For more, go to the: [Indiana page](#).

* **STANDARDS AND TESTING:** Opponents of state standards and testing generally ignore what has become obvious in Virginia and elsewhere: such standards raise achievement across the board. That became clear again in Arizona, where preliminary results from the latest Stanford 9 exams show scores moving up again for the fourth consecutive year. Preliminary statewide data shows that in math, all grades beat the national average; all but two grades beat the national average in reading; and about half the grades placed above the national average in language. [See more](#).

* **FEDERAL POLICY:** Secretary of Education Rod Paige went before the National Education Association's annual convention and offered a robust defense of choices in education, arguing that increasingly tough competition in education from private schools, parochial schools, charter schools, home schools and Internet schools spurs all schools to improve, and noting that "Public schools are no longer the only show in town." In underscoring the demand for alternatives, he pointed to Washington, DC, where 10 percent of students are in charter schools, and cited The Center for Education Reform's most recently survey finding that two-thirds of charter schools nationwide have waiting lists nearly half the size of their enrollment. To read, go to [Paige's speech](#). Click for [CER's "10 Questions for the NEA"](#).



The Center for Education Reform
910 Seventeenth Street, NW, Suite 1120 • Washington, DC 20006
800-521-2118 • 301-986-8088 • Fax: 301-986-1826
www.edreform.com • cer@edreform.com
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