



the  
**CENTER FOR EDUCATION REFORM**

**NEWLETTER TO FRIENDS OF  
THE CENTER FOR EDUCATION REFORM  
NO. 101**

**BACK-TO-SCHOOL  
AUGUST 2012**

Dear Friends:

“Can education be run as a profitable business and still be driven by a humanitarian vision? Why is there such angst over the tax-status of organizations that conduct their work to the benefit of others?”

These are questions that are often dodged by non-profits and non-profit backers, who fear a backlash from opponents of reform. These are also questions that must be resolved, or the current reform movement will plummet into obscurity. We cannot change public habits with philanthropy. We can mitigate the effects of bad policy, but real change must come from changes in law.

Don't get me wrong. I like non-profits. I run one, and with millions from generous donors, we have indeed changed policy, and we've spawned more non-profits, too. But I've never once believed them to be a superior form of business. In fact, while it's easier for people with money to write checks to a favorite charity or educational program that directly support a child or a teacher, it also makes it more difficult to make change as long as such programs work to mitigate the effects of bad policy.

Let me be a little more clear — if philanthropy is necessary to make districts change, make charters solvent or make people want to teach, why should policymakers or presidents ever change the way education is funded? Our leaders have little impetus to pass a real tenure reform bill (with all due respect to **Governors Cuomo and Christie**) as long as philanthropists write massive checks to start new schools and new programs that substitute for real policy change.

Those who back programs that do an end run around policy rather than a direct hit on the politics that protect bad policy turn missions into popularity contests and despite all the data and metrics that show such programs are having an impact, have they really moved the needle for good? Does a \$100 million contribution from **Facebook's founder** really change Newark any more than the \$100 million from Walter Annenberg nearly 20 years ago really changed Philly (or LA, or Chicago...)? Sure, today it will help you buy a few new school providers, some new teachers and new support structures. But what happens when that goes away, and policy is still the same?

I don't know yet if James Tooley addresses this exactly in his new book, *From Village School to Global Brand*, but I have a feeling he does. Tooley documents the successful rise of **SABIS**, a private, tax-paying company that launched a global network of schools that set out to change kids lives American-style — using the exchange of money and investment for demand to ensure its success. Public markets may hire SABIS and regulate its partnership, but this school manager doesn't require

a non-profit model to do its job. And apparently it does it well. SABIS schools rank in the top ten in Michigan and Massachusetts to name just two. Its story will be interesting to read.

It's not the only one of course. More than a dozen high quality management firms are capital-driven, using private funds to leverage the public good. And because the unions and their allies and oh-so-liberal politicians want you to think doing so is un-American and heartless, many entrepreneurs create non-profit models instead. It is often said that having just such a non-profit will mitigate union opposition. The reality is it does nothing of the sort.

This past Friday night, as I watched **Teachers Rock!**, a concert to celebrate teachers' achievements, I also watched the Twitter feed surrounding it. The venom that was being stirred by the union leadership through the social media as the CBS show took place was stunning in its sophistication and in its arrogance. From comments about teachers being bamboozled by shows like this, to criticism about **Teach for America**, the union troops were armed and ready to criticize and influence unsuspecting rank and file observers. It turns out their biggest beef is that the show's commercials highlighted the September 28th premiere of "**Won't Back Down,**" produced by Walden Media, which, like "The Help," is a real life dramatization of what is, and what could be, in this case, for parents and teachers. The show was sponsored by Walmart and General Mills, too, a fact that the unions use to portray the show as suspect. As business is selfishly behind the movement to change public education for the better. In their twisted view of the world, there is something bad about business being behind the movement to change public education for the better!

**Randi Weingarten** took me directly to task in one of her tweets after I criticized her for her comments regarding the "Won't Back Down" film, in which she called the parent trigger notion privatization. She asked "why would a charter advocate smear me when I have not even released a statement about the film?" Poor Randi, but how clever to suggest she was being smeared as opposed to being factually called on the carpet!

That behavior is notable throughout her tweets, her public statements and her speeches to her members, in which she stirs up animosity toward anyone who might suggest schools and unions might need an overall if we actually care about kids. That doesn't stop even reformers, however, from giving them credit for conceding on a tenure reform bill. Such support should tell you that there is "no there, there," but instead many fool themselves into thinking they accomplished something noble by getting union sign-off. The reality is there is nothing noble in itself about compromise unless the end result makes things better. There is nothing noble in itself about having a non-profit cause unless it makes things better. And there is nothing un-noble about creating or running a business for profit if it makes the world better for people.



Jeanne Allen  
President



THERE ARE NO TRAFFIC JAMS ALONG THE EXTRA MILE.

- Roger Staubach

Dear Friends:

I don't know about you but I'm tired of emails clogging my in-box, beckoning at me that "they" have the latest and best and greatest. If I'm lucky, I get a chance to glance at it during the day, park it in a mailbox for later, and by that time, dozens more communications about this or that issue have found their way to me and you know what? Like a bad sale rack after the season is over, the stuff all begins to look the same.

Here's the other thing: The Center for Education Reform (CER) has always prided itself on great customer service. Since 1993, we've worked hard to not only solicit your calls and queries, but to make sure you had every chance to talk to a real person, get a real answer or toolkit and make sure your needs are addressed in a real way. The phones used to ring off the hook — in a good way! We knew who you were, what you needed and why, and what's more, we could then tell your story to the media, to lawmakers and others who may have been skeptical that we were telling the truth when we said people want better schools for their communities and are willing to fight for it!

These days many of you thousands who get our alerts, *Newswires* and press releases are just a name. I'm with you — it's great to be anonymous sometimes. I'm just not sure that's really the best way to ensure that the education reform revolution becomes the massive revolt that once began in earnest, before the advent of mass emails. (More on that another time!)

It's been nearly 19 years since we penned our first *Monthly Letter to Friends* (we published 100!) and nearly 8 years later we became the first education organization to deliver a weekly email missive (The CER *Newswire* debuted on January 10, in the year 2000 and has continued unabated for 12 years engaging and entertaining thousands since, along with hundreds of good and not-so-good copycats!)

And so it's time to shake things up — again. As I shared with our colleagues at CER's 18th Anniversary, *Rockin' Reform Revue* last fall, where the first ever "EdReformies" were awarded to eight stellar individuals and fellow EdReformers entertained and rocked the night away, we've always been unconventional in our approach to reform and in our approach to getting more people onboard.

I've decided that while the written word can indeed move mountains, we have decided to go the extra mile in our approach to our various communiqués, so that their impact can be more strongly felt.

So, *Newswire* has become a daily news digest, and you'll be able to sign up for these updates daily. We've offered this service all along on our blog *Edspresso*, and it is what drives much of our work at the Center each day. But we feel it is a better service to you - our customers - if you have greater access to this tool.

If you like our insights and our products, you'll love the [New Letter to Friends](#) even more. A couple of pages of news and insights you will not get anywhere else will share space with insights from the past, and lessons from the front where real policies and people have forged battles once thought unattainable — and won.

When we stop striving to question what we do and whether it's the right thing or good enough, we lose.

Thankfully, I hate to lose, and so, I'm happy to examine what's gone before, what might go in the future, and how you can help play a role in both. Along with my fine leadership team, we will be augmenting the work you find at [Edreform.com](http://Edreform.com) and coming to you at least monthly, on paper or electronically, (choice is up to you) the [New Letter to Friends](#) for you to open and read at your leisure. That is, if you choose to join us.

You'll need to opt in, not opt out, for this new donation-based subscription service, but we will give you a few weeks to make a decision. Someone smart once said that being invested in something drives one to do more with it. We think with your support, it will drive us to keep making a better product.

We'd love your feedback, so please take just a few minutes now to fill out the enclosed quick survey and we'll send you a complimentary copy of *The School Reform Handbook: How to Improve Your Schools!* You can also visit [www.surveymonkey.com/s/CERNewLetter](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/CERNewLetter) to fill out the survey online.

And, we will continue to deploy the best in social media through *The Media Bullpen*, through our *Twitter* and *Facebook* accounts and of course, our exceptional website which hosts and promotes the latest innovations, ideas, and efforts to ensure activism and accuracy for better educational choices and accountability in all schools.

You can log onto [www.edreform.com](http://www.edreform.com) any hour of the day and get the latest on state and local efforts and activism, the latest news and our insights. As for our CER Newswire and its jam-packed library, we'll be bringing you more news from there.

This year, as we head into our 20th anniversary, The Center for Education Reform remains the pioneer and leading advocate for substantive, structural change in American education. Its people and policies have helped fuel an exciting generation of reforms and new activists challenging the proverbial conventional wisdom day in and day out. Our work has led to 1 billion impressions in the media on reform, millions of new school choices and dozens of new laws. Oh yes, and it's made a lot of people really angry for challenging their old and iron clad protection of a tired and worn out system.

We've scripted ads and movies, laws and regulations. We've inspired people to come into and stay in reform, and argued for — and against — appointments to commissions and agencies, hoping good people would do good things once chosen. That hasn't always turned out to be the case, anymore than our kids always make the right choices. But just like we examine what we can do to help our own children day after day, we can examine what happens with people and policies to determine how we can all do better.

Once upon a time it was our dream — to make Education Reform mainstream, to make it cool, and to ensure it transcended all ideologies. We've succeeded in that. Now it's time to go the "extra mile" to make sure being mainstream and cool keeps getting results.

I hope you'll look forward to our new communication. Be sure to let us know how best to get it to you and to receive your free copy of *The School Reform Handbook* by filling out the enclosed survey.



Jeanne Allen  
President