

**MONTHLY LETTER TO FRIENDS OF
THE CENTER FOR EDUCATION REFORM
NO. 19**

SEPTEMBER, 1995

Dear Friends:

Greetings to new and old friends, who are among our 11,000+ readers this month. Let us know what you think (good or bad!), and what interesting things may be happening where you reside. (The reform tent is very big -- if you're a new reader, we hope you'll consider coming in!) The last few weeks have been chock-full of happenings, information and surveys. As we formally enter the new school year, it is clear that the status quo is on the march, defending their defenseless positions, and that reformers are growing by leaps and bounds in their numbers and in their activities. Let's take a look.



The Good News in Public Education?

Where there's smoke, there's fire...and, boy, have the airwaves been burning up with almost daily pronouncements coming from the U.S. Department of Education (ED) that the nation has "turned a corner" toward higher achievement in public education. Or have we? Consider:

- The SATs this year recorded gains of 8 points, the first since 19TK, . The test has been dramatically changed, with the removal of several sections, including the famous "antonym" section, and the addition of an extra thirty minutes to finish the test! This year's average score is 428 on verbal, and 482 on math.

- No such gains were noted on 95's ACT scores.TK Nor were there any gains displayed in reading proficiency among 4th, 8th or 12th graders. As we reported in June the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) showed that only about a third at these levels were proficient in reading.

- The ED also reports that more children are college-bound, and that the dropout rate has declined some. What isn't said is that more kids are graduating or getting the equivalent by the age of 24, but in many areas, the rate is as high as 50% of those who graduate four years later. Tk And then there are the policies, as in Washington, DC, that mandate no holding back in grades K-2. Better education? You decide.

From the Trenches

- Breaking news from **Wilksburg, PA** late last month proves, as Bette Midler might say, that "God is watching us." There the school board decided that its problems were so severe in its schools that it wanted to try some unique solutions with a private firm. Targeting one school, Turner Elementary, the Board called in the Tennessee-based Alternative Public Schools, Inc. to take over and institute a longer school year, day, new hiring and firing policies, and a brand new, personalized curriculum. The union there went nuts. A lawsuit ensued. The Governor weighed in. The school board defied a court order to cease and desist until it could consider the actual merits of the plan. It looked like curtains for Turner and its kids. Then only two days before the court had declared it would replace the entire school board if it did not cancel the contract, the PA Supreme Court gave the go ahead to Wilksburg to start the experiment. A court hearing to determine whether it is permissible under PA law is September 18, but the in the meantime, nearly 300 kids will be making history -- and getting a shot at a better education -- come September 5.
- A not-so-nice Supreme Court in **Wisconsin** slammed down an injunction forbidding the continuance of the newly expanded Milwaukee school choice program, days after several hundred children already began in their new schools of choice. Again, the court has yet to decide the merits of the new law, which was challenged by the ACLU, the state teachers' union, and the NAACP. This one's likely to go the U.S. Supreme Court, but in the meantime, thousands of children who might have had their first shot to go to the school of their choice will have to wait and see.
- **School board members** overwhelmingly voiced their disdain for the federal role in education in a survey taken in July by the American School Board Journal. Nearly three-quarters of those who responded to the informal poll said "it's time for the Education Department to pack its bags and get out of town." Some of their comments: "I have not detected any advantage...It has provided nothing but red tape and mandates." "The federal role in education has had no significant impact ...at the local level... Education belongs to the states." "...The most effective results are achieved when decision-making occurs at the lowest possible level." Most said that money should be given directly to states and school districts.
- The Business Roundtable, has finally added the component of **parental choice** to the body of its nine essential elements for reform. The second edition of its education policy agenda keys on standards, school accountability, professional development and so on, but the normally timid business leaders dare to suggest that "a successful system enables parents to support the learning process, influence schools, and make (public) choices about their children's education. Many might

think it's still timid, this is bold for an organization that never had the "c" word on the table before.

- **Missouri** has inaugurated a new report card for all schools, which will provide school-by-school comparisons on a number of specific items, such as test scores with comparisons to state and district averages; dropout rates; pupil attendance; cost to educate; salaries; enrollment numbers in programs like gifted and talented, special education and so forth. Observers expect that once the process begins in '96, they'll be a lot of new information out in the public that will allow more accountability shine through. As one parent put it, any form of openness is appreciated.
- Oakland and four **California** school districts have begun the school year with a new requirement that anti-mandate people actually like -- school uniforms -- thanks to a law enacted last year. While some say it won't make much of a difference, the evidence across the country, and in the Golden State, points to just the opposite. Long Beach reports that violence and fighting dropped more than 50% last year, leading to increased achievement. "Attire is attitude and attire will take you to new altitudes," said one school official. Years ago a dozen Washington, DC kids pleaded for uniforms to a conference audience. They reasoned that with uniform attire, the fights over-- and demands to wear -- "chic" clothing would take the pressure off, reduce tension, and maybe even help gangs dissipate. It's certainly worth a try.
- The **break-up of a big city school district** is not something you hear about too often. Next year TK, voters in California will be able to decide whether the City of Angels should be broken up into smaller, school districts. The reasoning is smaller is better, more effective, more accountable. That's particularly true when combined with school-based autonomy, and options for families. It won't all happen overnight, but it's certainly worth watching. Chicago and New York next perhaps?
- Continuing the trend-setting, California is also committed to restoring balanced **reading instruction** in the schools, by adding phonics as a prerequisite for gaining essential skills. Space constraints this month don't allow us to tell the whole story, but suffice it to say that several states in the land are reaping the results of dismal reading scores and children who even in the 6th grade have little spelling ability. (See In the News for related story). The unusually broad coalition of state policy makers and education officials mean there's a good chance phonics will be in the schools again soon. After all, self esteem is nothing if your boss fires you because you can't spell.
- **Texas'** long-drawn out reform battle this spring came up a winner with one particular provision in the new law that allows children assigned to low-performing schools to take their public education grant and go elsewhere for public education. The new choice provision applies to schools in more than 100 counties, according

to the Texas Public Policy Foundation. Parents of children in failing schools will now have a critical option in helping their children learn.

- Some news from **Colorado** is that the charter movement, while still undergoing attacks by opponents, is alive and flourishing, and having an enormous impact on public schools. Says the Colorado Childrens Campaign, charters are drawing many students back into public schools, and the very existence of charters is changing the context of incentives ...in which public schools operate, offering the potential for system-wide change. There a one-room school house, a progressive school stressing personalized learning and heavy reliance on student portfolios for assessment, a school for at-risk, a Core Knowledge school, and many more. Many want to liberate the schools further from some of the legal constraints of the law, which was one of the nation's first. The multiplicity of themes, demand and successes should be a model for other states and should give the legislature there pause to consider expanding it.

- Speaking of **charters**, we're astonished to find so many misconceptions from legislators considering this widely acclaimed reform. Resistance from vested interest groups are natural, but from state policymakers, it is surprising. Legislators meeting at the annual American Legislative Exchange Council were nearly unanimous in their support for charter schools, and the Education Commission of the States, not long a player, has jumped on board, with a good survey on charters, and other support. In Ohio, where a very strong bill has passed the house and is awaiting Senate activity, some legislators claim they think that charters drain money from the public schools, they're not accountable if they're not in a school district, and they're elitist. All of these are without merit, particularly if you look at the charters now operating. Charters are public schools; with enrollment increases expected, one would think that lawmakers would be unanimous in their support for finding creative ways to find new providers. (The Center's Charter School Info Pak can help you flesh out the issues.)

- Of course, if being part of a school district were all it took to be accountable, 100% of the public schools would be working well. In **Akron, Ohio**, the board there even voted to squash movement to other schools under the state's open enrollment law, because they want to preserve racial balances. Never mind that perhaps many are leaving because of quality. In fact, several neighboring districts have even opened up new schools in response to the high demand by choosing parents. Akron Superintendent Brian Williams reasoned that "we have fought hard to keep the racial balance e of the district as close to the city's...we have determined we can no longer permit the loss of these children." That's funny, I thought he was a *schools* superintendent...

Meanwhile, in Columbus, the board agreed that high schoolers waiting for the school of their choice will be permitted to leave their assigned school, ^{ir}regardless of racial balance. Nearly 700 children were on waiting lists for schools that had seats, but because of racial balancing, were not immediately accepted. The district looks at

all factors, including racial balance, but as soon as it is clear all of the options are exhausted and there are spaces available, children at all levels will be permitted to go to the school of their choice. Perhaps the Akron Superintendent should visit Columbus...

- Speaking of perestroika, one school district in **Arizona** (home of the most expansive charter law where 46 new schools open this year) just doesn't get it. Phoenix officials have denied nearly three-quarters of charter applicants their ability to leave, citing desegregation rulings that are over 10 years old. In this case, unlike Ohio, the decision is affecting minority youngsters, whose numbers the district reasons are needed to keep in compliance. In reality, it's just good old fashioned petulance, and trying to hold onto people who have found their needs met elsewhere.

Making the Grade (move above From the Trenches?)

Once again, the annual **Phi Delta Kappa Survey of Attitudes on Public Education** (name TK) is out, showing us that while 41% of Americans rate their public schools with As and Bs, only 20% do so for the nation as a whole. This time, Gallop tried to get to the heart of the schizophrenia by asking why this is so. They found little, except that healthy majorities think their own schools doing a good job with academics, discipline, curbing violence and dropouts. Interestingly, money was not a factor for almost 50%.

After looking at the survey details, we discovered one other interesting thing. There were less As this year than compared to previous years, and more Cs for their local schools, with 37% giving the average grade to their schools.

The poll also queried again on school choice, finding only about a third of those polled supported full school choice. Of course, for the past two years, Gallop has asked a pretty negative question, ie. do you support sending children to private schools at public expense? When you put it that way, it's no wonder there is 44% against; it sounds heretic to do anything at public expense! Advice for surveyors: if you're looking for accuracy, why not ask if people approve of allowing children in failing schools the opportunity to go to private school? Just a thought.

"Making Law is like making sausage"

The Education Department's media blitz continues with pronouncements that with enrollment expected to reach 53 million students by 1997, now is no time for budget cuts. It's a matter of national security, they say. Never mind that with a 40% increase in real spending since 1980 no real achievement gains followed. Never mind that few of the federal dollars ever see it to the classroom. Primetime Live did a great special in June (?) on this very subject. Joining the mantra of those who claim the end of the world is near with belt-tightening here and there, the National Education Association is stepping up it PR efforts to ward off budget cuts and reforms, undermine its own policies. Seeing concern over public education as a

lack of support for public education NEA chief Keith Geiger had the following to at their annual July shin-dig:

"...parents will withdraw into their own ethnic, religious or elite islands if the corporate takeover or voucher proponents have their way. Public schools will become schools of last resort.

"We cannot abandon public education because public schools are where children learn what it really means to be an American.

"We the public school employees of America, are not the unresponsive, change-resistant bureaucratic blob that public school opponents like to portray."

Please note that the delegates were still totally against any use of the private sector to help education along. They were more willing to experiment with their own version of charter schools, where site-councils work together freed from *some* regulations. The Reverend Jesse Jackson joined president Geiger in leading the survey of delegates. Said Jackson, "Parents will desert the public schools if they feel their children are not safe or learning the basics. We can't take their support for granted." We weren't aware that Jackson was a school reform expert. Nor did he send his kids to public school. What's that old adage -- put your money where your mouth is? ????

At the convention, Geiger took off a straight jacket and threw it in the trash, to suggest that the NEA is changing. Next year's focus will be on education reform, and for the first time ever, the convention will highlight "reform" and instructional issues. "We must reform from within or we will be dismantled from without."

Who said competition isn't good for the schools? Sounds like the competition coming from reforms across the land is making the blob rethink its attitudes. Don't expect anything different in policies; but the fact that it feels it, too, must portray itself as something different...well, it's a sign of the times. As you read our special *In The News* insert section, newsclippings from around the country show that many communities are wrestling with real problems, and coming up with solutions that Washington -- and the blob -- is not trumpeting.

Resources *Things to know, things you may need, things we may need*

Wanted: Model school district contracts that institute some sort of performance incentives for teachers. Everyone knows how difficult it can be for school boards to negotiate some performance elements into union contracts. We've heard of a few that have made progress, however, if you have or know of a good model contract, please send it to the Center. We're inaugurating an exchange program for school board members that might want to compare notes.

Wanted. Principal to help launch grade 6-12 charter school, opening in 1996, in Boston. The newly designed Academy of the Pacific Rim will integrate traditional Pacific Rim cultures' emphasis on learning and discipline with the American spirit

of self-actualization and mutual respect. The school will have a 210 school year and 8 hour day. Talented leaders with classroom and administrative experience: send resume to Dr. Robert Guen, 1035 A Beacon Street, Brookline, MA 02146.

The How To Get Your Child Ready For School Manual, an outstanding compendium of what you should do for your children outside of school, is now available from the Modern Red Schoolhouse Project of the Hudson Institute. Written by psychologists Jeffrey Rosenberg and Wade F. Horn, who is also president of the National Fatherhood Initiative, this constructive manual should be in the hands of every parent. Call (317) 545-1000.

The Educational Excellence Network, also an affiliate of Hudson issued its 94-95 *Report Card on American Education*, giving progress in math a C+; reading, a D; standards a C-; reinventing education, a B; and reforming the federal role, incomplete. For a copy, call (202) 223-5450.

The Education Industry Report is a must have newsletter for anyone wanting to stay abreast of current trends in the role of the private sector in education reform. Its mission is "to provide news and commentary on the emerging education industry." Each issue consists of news stories, interviews, developments in the industry financial reports from companies and an index of publicly traded education-based stocks. John McLaughlin of the University of Minnesota at St. Cloud is the editor. Call (612) 251-8323 for subscription information.

Important Event: From CEO America, a workshop for new and potential program administrators on how to run a what you can gain from starting a private scholarship program. Travel to Bentonville, Arkansas, the home of Walmart, on October 13 and 14 to learn what it takes to be part of this growing movement of entrepreneurs helping unprivileged children. For details, call (501) 273-6957.

End Notes

Schools were on recess for most of the past three months, but school reform was in session across the country. The media has been taking the temperature on education issues, and has contacted CER on everything extensively for help. Some of the Center's summer "media appearances" include: C-SPAN (8/26), America's Talking (8/24), The Washington Post (8/26) The National Journal (8/8), Forbes (8/31), Arizona Republic, (7/26) the Hartford Courant (7/15) The Cincinnati Inquirer (7/10), the Columbus Dispatch (6/30), Charleston Daily Mail (6/22), The Associated Press (6/7), USA Today (6/7), Los Angeles Times (6/2). ED WEEK AND ED DAILY?

One of hot issues in press and education circles was Denis Doyle's study "Where Connoisseurs Send Their Children to School," published by the Center. The findings, that public teachers in some of the country's largest cities send their own children to private school in disproportionate numbers, really hit a nerve -- AFT chief Al Shanker took on the study in one of his latest "Where We Stand"

columns, and denounced the findings as myth. The study, as well as local manifestations of the phenomenon, have been reported on in over Tk news stories and editorials coast to coast, and have drawn comments, good and bad, from educators and parents in city after city. Here are three of the more stellar examples:

HOUSTON CHRONICLE 7/23/95 -- Superintendent Raymond Reddick [of the South Delta School District in Rolling Fork, MS] is calling upon white teachers - 40 percent of the district's faculty - to dispel concerns about their dedication to public schooling by enrolling their children in public schools.

"It's a moral thing that we cannot deal with legally," said Reddick. "But if the system is adequate enough for you to receive a paycheck from, then I feel it's only fair that you give back to that system."

SUNDAY ADVOCATE (Baton Rouge) 7/23/95 -- Steve Monaghan, executive director of the East Baton Rouge Federation of Teachers, did not challenge specific numbers in the study, but said they should be considered "suspect" because they are presented as part of the school choice agenda.

The survey shows that public school teachers are "not going to let [their children] go under with [the public schools]", said Monaghan.

THE BOSTON GLOBE 6/16/95 -- "When teachers and their husbands or wives sit down to decide where to send their children to school, I don't think they act any differently from people in other professions," said Boston Teachers Union president Edward Doherty, (who's kids went to public schools).

But parents said the data sends the city's families a terrible message. "Obviously, they have the right to end their kids wherever they want, but I think it doesn't speak well of their faith in the school in which they teach...It is not what I would call a vote of confidence," said (public school parent) Robert Tumposky.

"If teachers who teach our children feel that the system is not really doing a good job, then that is on them," said Hattie McKinnis, director of the Citywide Parent Council. "If you are providing quality services, then you would have your children there also."

The Center works to put and keep education reform in the news. The more people have the facts, the more good reform will take hold at the community and school level. It is for that reason we established the annual Excellence in Journalism Awards to recognize and encourage comprehensive reporting on education reform issues. The media's influence on the direction of education reform is substantial. We encourage you to work with the media to ensure the highest standards in reporting and to make education the front page issue it should always be.



As you begin what appears is already a very frenzied school year, please know that we are here to meet your needs.

Jeanne Allen, *President*

SPECIAL INSERT -- SEPARATE PAGES, INSERTED INTO MONTHLY LETTER
THIS PAGE FOR INFORMATION PURPOSES ONLY

In The News *A roundup of daily news reports on reform*

On School Report Cards, from the *Providence (RI) Journal Bulletin*

It is said that information is power...the School Department is planning to give parents an unprecedented amount of information by publishing a report card for every school.

Supt. Zarrella said it will bring a little "friendly competition" to city schools. 'This will be our first stop in holding our system accountable school by school,' he said. For parents...who choose where to send their children, the report cards will give them ...information that has been either difficult to attain or nonexistent. For administrators, the reports may help draw attention to schools that need help.

In addition to profiles of the students, staff and building, report cards will contain ... descriptions of goals, initiatives and achievements as well as the best teaching practices, alternative student assessments and special programs,... number of student suspensions and teacher grievances and the amount of parental involvement. (6/19/95)

On Choosing Charter Schools, from *Providence-Journal Bulletin, Mass. edition*

On Michael Rebello's first day of school, he was jumped by six children while playing Power Rangers. The kids thought he was the bad guy. The following day, Michael was shoved into a door, leaving him with a cut on his face. Soon after, [Linda] Rebello decided she would send her 6-year old son to the city's new charter school instead of the public schools. "I want him to want to go to school, not be scared to go to school, she said.

...At the Atlantis charter school her son will receive greater attention..learn different languages, be hooked up with a mentor....These are just a few expectations that parents have come away with upon registering ...at Atlantis - a school that pledges to restore education to the people. "We're looking to have a heavy parental involvement..build a family atmosphere" said John Corriero, president of Atlantis.

Atlantis plans to hold classes between seven to eight hours a day, six days a week, for 220 days a year, stressing math and physical sciences by using 'the sea' as its theme.

As a former superintendent of Fall River schools, Correiro hopes Atlantis will be a departure from the bureaucracy he experienced in the past. "A lot of what we came away with is the frustration of not seeing things get done... I had to fight like heck to let minor things go through."

Atlantis had received over 400 applications to fill 20 faculty slots, and will enroll 300 students. They recruited from amongst the local housing developments.]

"Not everyone has been supportive of this new approach. Teachers unions and local school officials argue that charters will destabilize the public school system." Atlantis responds: "A little school with 300 people poses no threat to the Fall River school system. [We're not trying] to establish a kingdom here - we're just trying to make something happen." (6/16/95)

On a private-like public school, from *The Oregonian*

Concerned parents are using public funds to create a pioneering private school within the Bend/La Pine School District. It will provide an enriched environment...in which the kids can pursue [their] interests.

The community school will not be housed in any facility owned by the district, and the district will not provide staff at any level. "They will hire a staff and... use a curriculum they select." (Oregon has a 10-year old alternative education law, designed to help children with attendance or discipline problems) The President of the Bend Education Association said that... he thinks any certified teacher working at the school should be covered under the association's contract. Shannon Bauhofer's daughter will be in the sixth grade at the community school. [It] is exciting to her. "It will show others that it's something they can do whether they live in Nebraska or Iowa...To me, it's what education should be about...it should be something the kids will buy into."

Oregon Superintendent Norma Paulus says "it represents a workable alternative to charter schools, an idea she and others fought to a standstill. 'I urged the school board to approve this.'" (The Oregonian, 8/16/95)

On responding to competition, from the *Omaha World-Herald*

Nearly eight of 10 Millard (Nebraska) School District residents who sent their children to private schools did so, in part, because the schools offer religion, a district survey says.... Four of 10 parents cited discipline...more than a third mentioned a more traditional or more rigorous curriculum.

The results of the survey...revealed some areas where the district can't compete..but also where it can improve, said Superintendent Ron Wit. "If you're losing your customers, you need to understand why."

...The surveys are thought to be the most comprehensive ...in the Omaha area, and representatives from other districts have expressed interest in Millard's findings. The interest is related to a spurt in nonpublic school enrollments in the Omaha area. While public school enrollment was up less than ...1 percent from the previous fall, Catholic school enrollment was up 5.1% and other private schools reported at 19.1% jump.

[School Board President] Mrs. Lamberty said the board started asking questions a year ago for answers to why parents were choosing alternatives. Questionnaire (s) were mailed to 1,107 parents of private school students and to the 100 families who used the [choice] law to send their children to other public schools.

Mrs. Lamberty said the survey responses were a "mandate" for a comprehensive survey of all district residents. "We've got to make sure parents think children are being challenged enough." (7/20/95)

On more accountable schools, from *The New York Post*

A good idea needs to be repeated. Sy Fliegel and his colleagues at the Manhattan Institute...have an idea that's a doozy: They think the next Schools Chancellor should be the last one.

Fliegel wants the locus of power (and money) shifted...to the principals at each school... "One person," they argue, "cannot be responsible for the education and safety of one million school children."

Yet Mayor Guiliani and the Board are locked in a fractious debate about both the necessary 'qualities' of the next schools boss and who will pick a replacement...It's no wonder that Board members are not satisfied with the 163 names they had... Superman didn't apply, and Superwoman hasn't been created.

Except that Rudy Guiliani has thrown up a caution flag, pronouncing his preference for a manager...and insisting that the Board will not pick right. Picking right means choosing a chancellor who can squash the bureaucracy. Just finding out where the bodies are, and where they buried the treasure of discretionary funds has been hidden by the civil service, bean-counters can be a full time occupation...

"Meanwhile, the children are smothering in the guilt of terrible inequities and incalculable horrors...it's a wonder that any learning --much less meaningful progress.. can take place. (8/16/95)

On starting a charter school, from *The Washington Post*

The flier came in the mail, announcing a chance to enroll in a D.C. public school that is starting from scratch...It sounded good to Anne Hemphill, who took her children to see what the new school was all about...Warren and Amy Belasco, frustrated with their neighborhood school saw this as an alternative to private education for their son, who had been put on the waiting list at some of the best public schools in the District. " It's like the last hope before pulling out of the school system altogether," Belasco said.

By filling out applications [for the] Bilingual/International School, [they] were stepping into one of the hottest trends nationally in education reform: charter schools... Charter schools has been tossed around as a solution to the problems plaguing the city's schools. Members of the D.C. council have advocated charter schools, and a recent plan developed by House Republicans calls for the Smithsonian Institution, the Library of Congress an the National Science Foundation to sponsor such schools.

The DC Board of Education approved a school reform policy in the spring allowing charter schools. The policy is far more limited than legislation passed elsewhere...they are not independent of the school board [and] don't have complete authority to hire and fire.

"This charter was a little wedge we saw to respond to consumer demand," parent and organizer Glenda Partee said. "If we can do this, perhaps other parents will feel more empowered. These are the kind of things that will draw people back into the school system." (The Washington Post, 8/21/95)

On choices for minority children, from the editor, *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*

America is a wonderful place... Florence Alexander made a fortune on minority set-aside contracts. She's using a portion of that fortune to establish a prep school on the campus of the old Tift College at Forsyth, which she purchased for \$6 million.

About 90 percent of the students attracted so far to Ebon International Preparatory Academy are black but she hopes eventually to have a better racial balance. Yearly tuition is \$6,500 with transportation ...and \$13,000 with room and board... Expensive, yes, but Atlanta Schools spend an average of \$7,650 per student .

The next question, then, is obvious: Why not assign the \$7,650 to children and let their parents buy the kind of education they want at the school of their choosing? Why not acknowledge that society's obligation is to individuals and not to structures? What works for one child doesn't for the next and parents should be able to pick from a smorgasbord of educational offerings?

It is indefensible that a state which provides funding for kindergarten and for college students to go to the school of their choice, public or private, insists that students in between take the education handed them.

Makes no sense that an Ebon exists, offers a safe, structured environment where children can be immersed in achievement. And yet, the children who need it worst are least likely to be afforded access. (7/12/95)

On new professional groups for teachers, from the *The Virginian-Pilot*

Two local teachers are hoping to give their classroom colleagues a new option when it comes to professional organizations - one they say will be less politically active and less expensive than education's two best-known national unions. Bill Carson and Wayne Adamson have set up the Professional Association of Teachers, a group they hope will draw educators from throughout Hampton Roads.

Although such associations are still a fledgling movement in the state, there is a growing national trend of independent teachers groups taking pains to distinguish themselves from the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers. "We want our organization to be affordable and professional and non-partisan... we don't want bargaining power. We're not going to get politically involved with candidates."

"The danger of organizations like this is in generating factionalism. It makes it difficult for the education community to come to agreement on what's needed to improve America's schools," said an NEA spokesman. Vicki Hendley, president of the Virginia Beach Education Association, said she would not view the independent group as a threat or a problem as long as its focus was in improving education, but she, too, had concerns about a splintering effect. But leaders of independent organizations say that part of the problem is in the national groups' assumption that all teachers are together in their thinking....Membership would cost \$80 per year...as opposed to \$300 or \$400 annual for a combined local, state and national membership in NEA or AFT (7/28/95)

On standards for educators, from *The Boston Herald*

The state Board of Education unanimously approved yesterday a set of performance standards for teachers and administrators. The 43 "principles of evaluation" include a call for teachers to be up to date on the curriculum, plan instruction effectively and use appropriate classroom techniques.

Headmasters and other administrators should...hold teachers accountable for having high standards... "What they're intended to do is to serve as really the minimum starting point for the creation of standards at the local level, said Nora Todd of the Massachusetts Teachers Association. (7/21/95)

On reading performance, from *The Baltimore Sun*

One of the searing images of Nathaniel Hurt's murder trial last spring came when attorneys questioned one of the youths present the night that 13-year old Vernon Holmes was shot dead.

The boy told the court that he couldn't read the statement he'd given police because he cannot read or write. He recognized the letters C-U-T, but could not decipher the word they spelled....The boy was in the sixth grade in Baltimore City Public Schools. While the city school system failed to meet practically all the goals in the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program, one of two areas where it did merit a satisfactory grade was in elementary school promotions. Something is wrong with this picture.

Members of the MD State Board of Education have finally reached this realization. They are expected to vote soon on excising the school promotion rate from the criteria it uses to judge schools. (7/18/95)

On Reading, from the *The Los Angeles Times*

In an attempt to swing the pendulum of education ...practice back somewhere in the vicinity of the center, the California Legislature is considering make the rather fundamental declaration that spelling ought to be taught in the state's schools. Phonics as part of reading instruction, is a good, idea, too, the bill... says.

The drive to re-examine the state's approach to teaching basic subjects has been gaining [bi-partisan] momentum since the state and national test scores released last spring showed that many California fourth-graders are struggling with reading and math. No basic skill, however, has been as neglected in California classrooms as spelling...Diane Gorshow, a...teacher who is a member of Eastin's reading task force, said the legislation is consistent with what the panel will recommend...and she welcomes the shift in emphasis.

"I have had people...remove phonics books so I could not teach the old way. They've removed our spelling books...Meanwhile, teachers have fought to get phonics... and spelling included in instruction. " (7/5/95)

On Inventive Spelling, from *The Phoenix Gazette* A teaching method called inventive spelling has educators arguing about when its appropriate to correct spelling. First graders...are being taught [with the emphasis] on expressing thoughts over correct spelling.

"On Saturday my sister Tessa and me were having a rase and I got a hed stared and Tessa got her speed and she codent stop and she bang her fase on the chair," Kaitlin, a first-grader wrote. No teacher's red pen slashed through her misspellings. There's no point in damaging the kid's self-esteem by telling her she's wrong, proponents say. The point is to get Kaitlin and other children to put their thoughts on paper.

"I think you should spell words correctly," state Superintendent of Public Instruction Lisa Graham said. "Consider me compulsive, but I think that's important." For example, an essay by an eighth-grader for the Arizona Student Achievement Program... scored a 24 out of a possible 25 although it was rife with errors.

Even the state Department of Educations [current] curriculum guidelines for the language arts say: "Instruction in grammar may actually harm a student's writing ability especially if grammar instruction increases time for writing instruction. Also, knowledge of grammar can inhibit student writing, make students less likely to take risks with language. (8/21/95)