

Dear Friends:

Ah, summer. New paths for some; continuing ones for others. Finishing school; starting a new one; exams, graduation. This time of year means so much in the life of a child or youth. And summer, while not everyone gets the old-fashioned 10 week break, provides lots of time to re-think how we are doing, and to plan ahead. Let's take stock of what we tell children to do in the summer, and do some of it ourselves, as we, too, take a break from the furied pace of reform, and do some planning for the next full school year, legislative session, or back-to-school community or school board meeting.



Highlights

There are some heart-warming stories, and stories of hope in the face of adversity, of individuals, programs and schools operating around the country. Here's a chance to learn about some of the true china-breakers; their thoughts, efforts and dreams. We draw from the Center's own correspondence bank, and info files, for this new section.

The true meaning of the word commitment, from a teacher in Arizona:

"....I thought I was fighting this battle alone, and then you told about the Barclay School, and about your organization.... How wonderful! I have been teaching for over 25 years and specialize in High School students... the ones who are falling through the cracks. The subjects being taught in school do not prepare them for survival in these difficult times. The students tell me over and over that they were bored and felt like they were spinning their wheels. They needed to get on with their lives. I have written a new and extremely unusual curriculum that takes students through HS in half the time and prepares them for a career... when they leave here, they have completed their GED and are enrolled in Community College heading towards the career of their choice...the best part is that it works. The parents back me up 100%. In fact, it was the parents that called and asked me to 'please teach our children. High School is out of the question and we don't know what to do.' ...90% of my students have gone on to good careers... Let me communicate with others who are making changes... it would be so nice not to have to fight this battle alone....I realize that I don't even make a dent in the educational field but perhaps, in this little corner of the world, some of these students will go forward and do great things. It only takes a few to help build a better world."

It does, indeed! If you want more info about this teacher and her efforts, we'd be happy to put you directly in touch with her.

Why New York needs charter legislation

"...Recently, members of our community sat down... to discuss the issues facing our community. The main issue was the state of our school and the cost involved in running it properly. Year after year we have been faced with runaway tax increases due to loss of state aid and what seems to be runaway spending. We also feel that this increase in spending is due to the ever increasing unfunded mandates facing our school system... During the past two years our school has been restructuring to gain control of its costs and ... deliver a quality education...the economic situation has deteriorated... The taxes have gone up almost 50% within the past two years. The people are very frustrated and want more control of their schools. They feel they can run them better and with better results by continuing the path we have started. Most believe to do this they must give school boards and administrators more control of the school. That means making them free from the bonds of the mandates. It also means allowing them to put in place a merit based pay system for all school employees. That is why I feel we need your help. Please send us the necessary information on the charter school system...

Business partnerships that mean something

Reading Alabama, is a literacy program designed to help kindergarten and first grade children learn to read. It is headed by a former education official, Anita-Buckley-Commander. The object of this coalition of business and community leaders is to raise money to put the Writing to Read program in schools, a computer assisted method. While certainly there are numerous other strong reading programs available, Governor Fob James has committed one third of this discretionary funding to match private dollars. Any school that receives the program must, in exchange, pledge to maintain the lab, provide a salaried lab assistant, and other such upkeep and maintenance.

Here's a guy that went from leading his community of Liverpool, NY to make sound fiscal and educational decisions (which did not sit well with those pushing the tax increases), to immediately getting involved in his new home in WA State.

".. There's a lot going on here if you think locally. Hispanic gang fights which the school administration will "fight" via two rather curious ways -- a 'unity mural' to be painted on an outside school wall... and the "taco truck" coming onto our campus at noon - but I believe it will take more than talk and taco trucks to control the armed and vicious gangs which have taken over [the local]public schools. Anyway, keep up the good work, and still thinking locally, I'm getting involved with the charter schools people in our state.

Pitching in to empower local citizens

The Harmony Empowerment Center in the heart of Cincinnati, OH is dedicated to organizing people around increasing results for children. Among the efforts, Harmony is engaging in some community conversations to engage the public more aptly on education. On their letterhead is inscribed the Margaret Mead quote, "To create the world we have - it's a question of...citizens getting together, deepening, growing, expanding their capacities, and then going out to make a difference."

Writes director David Nordyke, "...the Harmony Center is dedicated to enabling citizens to take action for themselves and promoting opportunities for all children to access quality education. We have just organized a legislative action committee dedicated to a broad school choice program that would encompass all children. Under consideration is the promotion and organization of a private scholarship trust by the Harmony Center. Any here's the best part - if you live in Ohio, you can get involved! Call David at (513) 531-5553.

For whom the bell tolls...

The last school bell -- forever -- was sounded at Tylerton School on Smith Island, Maryland. The last one room schoolhouse in the state, Tylerton is the victim of severe enrollment decreases; they're now down to 2. Residents actually considered attracting foster care students to the island, but the district complained that it would separate the kids from the parents too far. There's only the potential for one additional "natural" Tylerton child being born soon, so the two remaining students will have to hop on a boat CHECK NUMBERS -- 7 or 2. -- everyday and go across to the mainland, a prospect that not only scares TK name but makes him ill thinking about it. The only other option was to combine the small island communities, but the Somerset County Board complained that it was too costly. Currently the board pays \$62,000 to keep open the TK school-- which is more than TK a child. Still, with the safety....blah blah...

Providing advantages for the disadvantaged

When looking at the PAVE (Partners Advancing Values in Education) program report and audit report for the year, one doesn't expect to see anything dramatically exciting. Wrong! PAVE, as you may recall, is the privately funded scholarship group that helps those with little means to send their children to private school. It is based in Milwaukee, the subject of much controversy over school choice. But what's all the fuss about, when you look at the stats! According to this report, PAVE is serving 4,301 underprivileged children who have voluntarily chosen to be educated in a private, more successful setting. PAVE Chairman John Stollenwerk, the CEO of Allen-Edmonds Shoe Company remarked at a recent conference celebrating the private scholarship movement, that PAVE's success, and the success of the other 26 programs nationwide like it, demonstrate the power of choice and its ability to bolster student success.

We are not alone

If you've ever had the feeling that America is all alone in its struggle to reform education, take heart -- in a misery loves company sort-of-way. A White Paper on Education, published last year in Ireland, set off a storm of controversy when it proposed the removal of history as a core subject of the Junior Cert level (tenth grade in the US). In response to the public's outcry over the proposal Ireland's Minister of Education has suggested short courses in history and geography, and has directed the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment for advice on how a balanced and broad curriculum can be offered to all students.

Editorialized the *Irish Times*: "The decision [to review the matter is welcome] but it should also focus attention, not just on history, but on the wider issue of overcrowding in the curriculum and which disciplines should form the core curriculum for all students...the decision needs to be made in the context of a discussion of the full

educational programme which we as a society wish to provide for our children.”
Sounds familiar, doesn't it?

Stylish euphemisms

Before leaving the *Irish Times* behind, I just had to share the following. As we struggle with labels to classify every type of child -- Learning Impaired, Special Ed, Gifted and Talented, Specially abled, College track, VoTech -- I was struck by the kind eloquence of the author of the just mentioned *Times* editorial who wrote that the real issue of the curriculum debate was how to best serve the needs of all children, “both the academically bright and those whose talents are of a more practical nature.”

The stuff that dreams are made of

And since we're visiting overseas, this interesting note from Lisa Tonsager of Chicago, who in a letter congratulating our friend Chris White on his *Wall Street Journal* article supporting choice for DC children, wrote: “In Britain...before ‘graduating’ from elementary school, every student takes a test similar to our SATs, and anyone (receiving) a B or better may choose the school of their choice, in any town...absolutely free of charge!

“(Consequently) I enjoyed the rigors of a top-class education while having only to contribute bus fare for public transportation to a town 25 miles away. As someone who was told, upon returning to the US as a junior in high school, that I could easily enter as a sophomore in college...I assure you the extra bus trek in Ireland was well worth it.”

But the best part of Lisa's letter is her offer of help in establishing similar options for American children, “Maybe I'm dreaming, with grandiose ideas of actually contributing something to society,” she writes, “but since that's the stuff our country was built upon, I thought it couldn't hurt to give it a try.”

Black and White and read all over

Speaking of Chris White (and for the third smooth transition in a row), he really hit a nerve with his op/ed piece, “Mr. President, You Betrayed Our Party's Values” (*The Wall Street Journal* May 14, 1996). He received beau coup congratulatory letters and calls, and was interviewed by a dozen radio stations from around the country wanting to know more about school choice, the situation in DC, and the politics of it all.

One of the more interesting letters came from a former NSBA president who wrote, “Congratulations on the excellent article. As a past president of the National School Boards Association...I believe that the position (on vouchers) of both NSBA and me has mellowed. While the voucher experiment in Milwaukee may not have (been a complete success), I'm sure it has made those individual students better citizens, and better prepared to face the travails of life.”

Sometimes it's just a matter of principle

And for the final great segue, our kudos as well to Chris White. When he approached us about helping him with an editorial upbraiding his own Democratic party for scuttling the school choice plan for disadvantaged DC families, we explained that he could end up taking a lot of heat for speaking out. But he said he didn't care,

and that he wanted to say what needed to be said. He did, and we congratulate him for it.

Around the Nation

- When **South Carolina** Governor David Beasley proposed recently to allow vouchers for kindergarten, rather than make all the kindergarten programs full day and mandate state-wide enrollment, the knives, daggers and other ancient forms of hostility surfaced. The proposal died, needless to say. What many at that time didn't know in South Carolina is that the state already gives vouchers to low-income parents for various forms of day care, as they do in most other 50 states. The enabling legislation comes from the federal Act for Better Child Care, which began as a monstrous federal day care bill and was later made more rationale to allow some choices among low-income families. In Vermont, a group known as CHILD CARE OPTIONS, helps qualify families for the vouchers. Frank Heller, head of the Maine School Choice Coalition, is trying to help other states discover their own day care voucher. Only 60 families in Maine know about it and are participating.
- It seems that the ballot effort to ensure 95% of **funding for Los Angeles** schools (while limiting bureaucratic spending to 5%) is not as it appears. Backed by the UTLA, the local union, the measure does nothing to hold teachers or anyone at the school site accountable for results, and overhead is not defined. This would most probably lead to a situation where the union contract would stipulate any overhead they wanted as instructional support, and by passing the initiative, the district would be guaranteeing to fund all that was included in the contract, with no limits save the taxpayer's pockets. The proposal defines overhead currently at 6%, but a RAND study, sponsored by School Futures Research, showed that only 70% of taxpayer dollars are getting to the school site in California. UTLA, it seems, would like this proposal to pass so they can demonstrate that the schools are working efficiently, thank you very much, because until it does operate efficiently, taxpayers won't be likely to cough up more money. We were quick to jump on the bandwagon (MLTR TK), but will watch the details more closely next time. Voters, beware!
- *Policy Makers Views on the Charter School Movement* has just been released by the **Center for School Change** at the University of Minnesota, and is chock-full of important insights from 50 policymakers surveyed from seven states. Among the findings, is that most of the seven states considered charters as a means of providing alternatives, putting pressure on existing system to change, incentive for promoting student achievement, and similar reasons that come as no surprise to the nation's 270 charter schools, and an additional 68 approved which have not yet opened. The report also reexamines the beginnings of the charter movement, which is great historical knowledge to have, and highlights the changes policymakers think need to be made to make the reform more effective. Great stuff! Call 612-626-7403.
- The information from **Minnesota** about the results of the state's eighth grade minimum skills tests is pretty glum, despite nationwide reports that Minnesotans' consistently outperform other states on other criteria. The results showed that overall, only 63% passed the reading test, while 76% passed the math test. In the win cities, the

scores were much less, with 38% and 43% passing the reading and math tests in Minneapolis, respectively, and results of 44% and 51% passing in St Paul. While the cities were quick to point out the live of poverty and socioeconomic status that make for these results, Commissioner Bruce Johnson was quick to note that while money is not unimportant, “ethnicity and poverty do not stop kids from learning, and money along will not change this situation.” To those who look at the glass half-full and not half-empty, on the subject of the overall state scores, Johnson said that these tests are geared towards information that every 8th grader should know. By our own assessment, the tests are not overly strenuous, and by comparison, are not as rigorous as what is being used or about to be in New York or Virginia. There was also some interesting political wrangling about the release of the scores. State officials did not think it fair to release district by district scores, claiming comparisons were “irresponsible.” Governor Arne Carlson persisted, and thus residents of the Land of 1000 Lakes have one of their first real glimpses into student performance statewide.

- High Schoolers in **North Carolina** are also not faring so well. According to the *Carolina Journal*, “Last October, high school sophomores took the state’s new eighth-grade competency test, passing which is required for graduation. Of those 1,700 students, 1,261, or 73 percent, failed — even though many were taking the test for the second or third time.” Other districts fared much better; we would hope that more than a handful of high schoolers could pass eighth grade muster. Prior to this year students were required to take a test with a sixth-grade competency barometer.

- Despite high praise for **Indiana** Governor Evan Bayh, who was honored earlier this year by the National Governors Association for achievement in producing a “top education goals report,” Indiana ranks 49th in the nation in the proportion of adults who hold college degrees. The Indiana Policy Review also reports that “Indiana students rank 34th in literature and composition, 47th in English, 50th in biology and 51st — dead last — in chemistry and mathematics on the 1995 Advanced Placement tests.” So much for gubernatorial awards.

- A familiar cry continues to come from people worried that **charter schools** will eat into their share of tax dollars, and so these people often argue that charter schools are or will bankrupt the public schools, by withholding seriously needed resources. Never mind, as we’ve said before, that when children move, money moves, too. It’s a commonplace occurrence in America — whether the child leaves the public system, the district or the state. But the issue has now been taken to the extreme.

Witness a letter to the editor of the *Wall Street Journal*, from the Chairman of a group in Massachusetts named Citizens for Public Schools. She writes that charters are unfair, that they are “private schools funded by public dollars, not accountable to the local community”, and that the “funding mechanism of the present law” allows for charters to take a disproportionate share of the pot from traditional public schools, specifically in Cambridge. Speaking the truth, the Pioneer Institute for Public Policy Solutions responded, that “every Massachusetts school district that contains a charter school received more state funding this fiscal year than it did last year, before charter schools opened.” In addition to new funding brought about by the state’s 1993 reform act, “districts like Cambridge with high levels of education spending are reimbursed by the Commonwealth for half the money they lose due to students choosing to attend

charters...Lower spending districts receive full reimbursement...Unlike traditional public schools, charters must apply to have their charters renewed every five years and can be closed if they do not accomplish their mission...they are truly public in every way." For our part, if a child chooses to move, the school to which the child goes should receive the funding allocated for that school. More and more legislative bodies are allowing school districts to double-dip, setting up more spending problems, and impeding the catalyst of choice from doing its job. Pioneer has done a tremendous report about the financial breakdown of each of the state's districts, as well as a compendium of charters in the news. Call (617) 723-2277.

- **Georgia's State Board** is being criticized widely for holding a teleconference without letting the public or the state's superintendent's know it was going on. The meeting was to discuss hiring a person to write the state's curriculum. Superintendent Linda Shrenko, who does not belong to the same party as those on the board, was scoffed, a move she considers "illegal, unethical, immoral and low." The same board is trying to remove the Superintendent's new found hiring authority, which came by way of the legislature.

Boasting With Pride

- Upon the retirement of Thomas Shannon, the executive director of the National School Boards Association, the American School Board Journal gives him a send off by singing his praises. Shannon took the NSBA from a budget of \$4 million to \$18 million today, with 130 staff. His leadership is partially noted. Boasts the mag, "Recently he composed a letter to every board of education president in the country endorsing the idea that school boards ought to include AASA (American Association of School Administrators) membership dues in a superintendent's employment contract - one year after AASA endorsed NSBA's national affiliate membership program (allowing/urging superintendents to join NSBA) Cozy is one word for it.

- "Call it a "dues benefit" -- starts this little ditty, from the March issue of NEA Today, courtesy of a very, angry teacher. "In lieu of a bonus, Greely, CO Education Association leaders got their *district* to pay one year's dues to the professional organization of each members' choice. As a result, GEA membership grew from 560 to 722 - and reaction from existing members was positive. 'It was a recognition of our professionalism,' says GEA President Dorothy Benner." Or, Dorothy, perhaps it's coercion. What do you think?

- Finally, the Lawrence Township [NJ] Education Association boasts to the NEA, that it has stopped -- I repeat, stopped -- "the contracting of 44 custodial jobs by 'reaching out big time' to the community. The 400 member local petitioned residents and spoke against privatization during school board meetings and even Back-to School nights" (FYI: this is supposed to make you happy). "The payoff: the board agreed to contract language requiring the district to pay one year's salary as severance to any employee who loses a job as a result of privatization." Is anyone else picturing that movie where Mel Gibson (the good guy) is gagged and the bad guy has a gun pointed at this head?

And Some Miscellany

- While we certainly want to make sure you get registered for the Education Leaders Council Conference on September 16 and 17 in Boston — *Education Reform: A National Happening* — you simply must first get to the annual AAEPP conference, EDVENTURES '96. The American Association of Educators in Private Practice is devoted to helping “EDVenturers seeking new opportunities with the rapidly changing face of education.” Their event, August 1-3 in Milwaukee, has a star-studded line-up of people like Howard Fuller, Ted Kolderie and others. Call 1(800) 252-3280 if you're interested.

- Wanted: Reform-minded superintendent, not threatened by true site-based management. Can have a traditional education background, business or military. Located in beautiful Durham, North Carolina. Send resumes to the Center, or inquire directly of Phillis Scott, school board member, at (919) 493-2792.



- Next month we'll tell you what the Americans United for Separation of Church and State had to say about comments last month, and about one Don't Worry, Be Happy Hall of Famer, who turned down our offer of induction. And of course, more about real concerns over reform! We'll see you after the 4th! Have a great Independence Day!

Jeanne Allen