



## ***Occasional Letter to Friends***

SUMMER 2018

Dear Friends:

This newsletter began on a plane, a place we spend a lot of time. I was headed back from California's Bay area (apologies to all I did not take time to see in my short trek) where I was knee deep in preparation for CER's upcoming 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Summit & Celebration, first with the incredible Michael Moe, co-founder of GSV and CER's Vice Chair, and his team, who will be bringing their lessons for start-ups and students interested in becoming entrepreneurs, to the **big event in Miami, FL, October 25-26**. Then it was over to discuss global issues with a Chinese company engaged in personalized learning and finally, to the magnificent Stacy Childress of New Schools Venture Fund, whose passion and commitment to creating and stimulating new seats for students to learn is incredible. They will also enrich the 25<sup>th</sup>!

Shortly before that journey I had the good fortune to cavort with the entrepreneurial Jonathan Harber of StartED, whose accelerator stationed at NYU is making dreams come true for solutions-oriented people looking to create or scale their start-ups. They also will be on hand at CER's Silver Summit to connect and coalesce CEOs and school leaders to pressure test the best ideas of the day, along with dozens of others who are leading the charge in every facet of education, K through Career.

Why am I telling you all this? This engagement is more than a lead up to CER's Silver Summit — a feat in itself that we hope will be the highlight of your year. Rather, this is what we do daily — the meetings, etc. these are all the things we do daily and across the country by video, trains, planes and automobiles, and that is, **connecting people, organizations, innovations, policies and passion with one another, to help ensure that truly American innovation, ingenuity and opportunity reach every learner, student, and child, regardless of place or community**. With that, here is your ***Occasional Letter to Friends!***

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**BILL de BLASIO NEEDS TO GO...** *along with every other anti-education opportunity politician!*

My fellow education warrior Eva Moskowitz is getting parenthetically abused by Hizzoner Bill DeBlasio, who is again denying her amazing charter schools the space they need to operate, despite their being public schools, serving children who are no less public because the school their parents choose are not to be part of the ailing traditional system. Moskowitz was reported as “begging” the mayor to allow her to put 70 students in an under-enrolled Brooklyn school that was slated for closure. The Chancellor said it could be done with a stroke of a pen. But de Blasio’s intimate relationship with Randi Weingarten and the far-left wing of his party clearly prevent his ability to think rationally about what’s good for kids.

The thing is, Eva and NYC are more visible than most, **but this kind of stuff happens everywhere, from small towns to big cities in America.** You simply don’t hear about it in the fly over spots. Keep that in mind when you vote this November for every office, at every level of government. If they aren’t demonstrably for the hard work of education reform, they aren’t for it, period.

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## UNIONS TROUNCED! OR ARE THEY?

By now you’d have to be on a deserted island or lacking access to any electricity not to know that the U.S. Supreme Court ruled compulsory union fees unconstitutional. As we reported—nay, **screamed** from the rooftops — the decision struck a blow for freedom! “In affirming the position of Mark Janus, the Court ends the decades-long assault on worker freedom. While unions, particularly the teachers’ unions, have and will continue to decry the ruling, they would do well to look beyond the revenue-generating dollars-and-cents loss that it will entail and see the opportunity that it presents. That is, *the opportunity to secure support for their work based not on coercion, but on voluntary support from those who truly believe in the in the ideas, actions and pronouncements of any association to which they now may truly choose to belong.*”

Would that they’d all just move on. But, no... Now union friendly lawmakers are kowtowing to their patrons while they still have money to enact laws or policies that would still keep them swinging hard despite the ruling. According to Governing Mag, states are giving unions access to employees in orientation to help ease recruiting, making it easy to make their case. California does that, and alongside New Jersey and Washington state, makes it a crime for an employer to discourage union membership, so now we’ll have unions policing what employers say.

**Principals unions?** Then there is the continued assault on charters and unionizing them, with the American Federation of School Administrators on the prowl for new blood to recruit school leaders from charters to “join.” As EdWeek reports, “The largely non-unionized charter sector could present ample—albeit rocky—territory for expansion for unions’.” Rocky indeed. The likelihood of any of the education unions

winning significant support from the charter sector is extremely low, especially given unions' long-time, on-going opposition to charters and EdReform in general. The last thing most charter school teachers and administrators want is to give up their freedom to support out-of-touch and out-of-step labor bosses.

They are clever, these pesky behemoths, and accustomed to power. **Thankfully, Janus established that working in the public sector should not give anyone license to control you.** The unions' coffers are already declining so the amount of money they spend fighting change will be less. The fight will still happen, as will the battle to inform and galvanize ordinary Americans, but at least joining a union is now **a matter of choice – as education should be.**

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## BRING BACK VOCATIONAL EDUCATION...NOT!

I knew that would get your attention. So many people think that this is the answer. College isn't for everyone they say. I get it, but that's not really what you mean. You mean that college isn't worth it (**as a recent Pew study finds** most Americans believe) or that college is not as relevant as it used to be (as the **Strada Education Network's** massive ongoing research finds), or that all college does is give kids a chance to play ball, drink and waste time. Perhaps you think it's just a ton of money and you can make a decent living — even a great living — in manufacturing, plumbing, etc., and that there are too many jobs not filled, right? The list is endless but allow me to poke a few holes in it. The problems:

First, **you want college for your kids.** Yet those without schools or families who demand or expect the same of them simply have to settle for something less unless we offer otherwise. While many careers not requiring college degrees for critical, needed jobs, we must not deny any student the **opportunity** (*there's that word again*) to explore a broader, deeper more impactful array of core teachings that might inspire them to go into medicine, solve economic problems, or simply think and dream big dreams. I didn't know I would love American government and political philosophy, which fueled my passion for and ability to affect change in American life, politics & policy, but going to a 4-year residential college that gave me access to these things changed my trajectory and, I'd like to think, that of millions whom CER's work affects daily.

Many of my childhood friends were not so lucky. While some lead beautiful lives today, their paths were often fraught with challenges that were a result of not being pushed to excel, and in fact, being tracked into vocational programs simply because they didn't present well as 'smart' or highly capable book smart individuals. Which brings me to my second point;

Who decides? **Who decides who goes vocational or technical or career?** And who creates those programs? Did you know that most schools and districts have programs that are largely legacy programs, that they've just been there and done it that way? Like most public education programs and efforts, there simply is not a lot of deep work and thinking that goes into deciding how this particular technical program or course of study maps to a future career or aspiration, or what the workforce even needs these days? We've consulted major companies and studied many more, that report that the needs of, let's say manufacturing, actually do need a much deeper, broader education foundation to operate more technologically sophisticated machinery, to lead on supply chain issues, to manage the talent pipeline. When they have a lull in production, some companies believe that giving their workers more education is vital to continuing to build skills, bandwidth and brain capacity.

**NEWSFLASH:** Our brains are continuing to grow even as we age (thank God)!

There is much, much more I can write about this, and will, but suffice it to say that whether it's Switzerland or Germany or the good old days when you and I were in school, the pathway to a productive life and career – prosperity too – isn't answered by just saying 'bring back vocational education' (Mr. President) or career and technical programs like you just signed into law (necessary but not sufficient).

It's about creating a much more robust, 21st century network of thousands of pathways for learning at every level, exposing our kids to these pathways through great primary and secondary schooling. Far from the factory model we have today, education must be individualized, personalized and relevant to the needs of this generation and the next. When we teach our kids to think and do the basics and fundamentals, and expose them to future pathways, they can choose which suits them, and when.

We need such student-centered learning environments early in life. We need more and better options for higher learning – boot camps, 1, 2, 3 and 4-year institutions of higher learning, the ability to gain a credential that can be portable to and accepted by other institutions of higher learning, and of course, the ability to combine experience and work with academic work or career training.

We should be expanding our view of what we want for our students and adults who have yet to complete any form of post-secondary learning, not constrict our view to a nostalgic view of what vocational education did, could or might do.

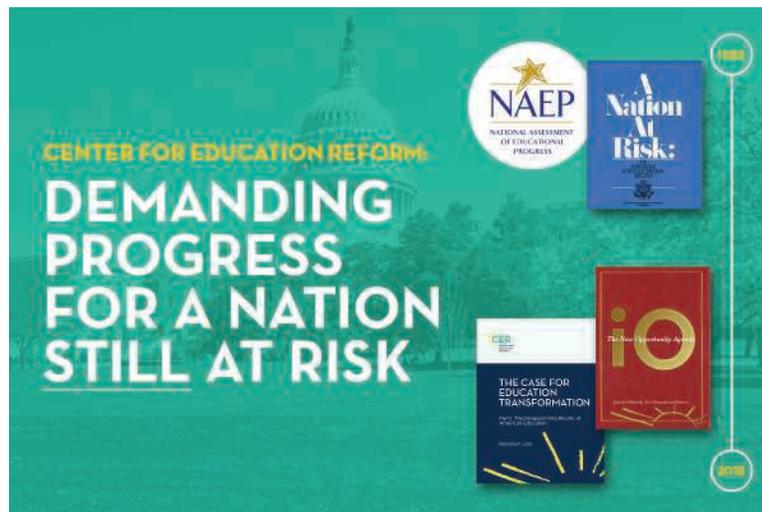
Yes, welders can be philosophers (recall Senator Rubio) and vice versa, but let's first make sure everyone has an opportunity to access all this great country can provide, and then whatever pathway they pursue, we can be assured we've given them all they needed to arrive or keep going.

Bring on your complaints and comments - I know you'll have them! More to come on this and the whole notion of higher learning, as CER today is devoted to expanding opportunity and innovation for **learners at all levels**. Our aim is to disrupt that which doesn't work and enable what we might do differently and better.

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## A NATION STILL AT RISK

You've heard the phrase, and you've seen the proverbial movie - kids for whom schools are funded some \$10,000-\$25,000 annually and who cannot read, write or spell at grade level. That's what Reagan's signature education manifesto **A Nation at Risk** revealed in 1983. The progress since, while steady, is alarmingly too slow. Indeed, on the eve of 35-year anniversary of that report, the **Nation's Report Card** (the National Assessment of Educational Progress or NAEP) found student achievement to be stagnant or declining from just 2 years prior.



The bright spots? We were not surprised to learn that the states that have most dramatically veered from the status quo, offering competitive opportunities to attend schools in vastly different settings and with freedom and flexibility to do so **showed dramatic progress, particularly with less advantaged students**; states like Arizona, Florida and D.C. which offer charters, scholarships, vouchers etc. have given the status quo and unions a run for their money.

Discussion of such amazing progress from REAL EdReform was sadly only a passing fancy at the first ever **Reagan Institute Summit on Education - RISE**, for short. I still get chills thinking about functions I attended as a young woman where President Reagan, whose Administration I once served, would speak fearlessly about our challenges, or chide arrogant politicians and dictators. I expected a similar bold approach at this event.

So, what for Pete's sake possessed the Reagan Institute to hold a conference focused on conciliation with people who don't even agree with Reagan's prescriptions for change? There was little mention of the deep and lasting impact of educational choice, the dismal state of education or Bill Bennett's Blob. Yes, Bill was there of course, as was Lamar Alexander and Rod Paige. In fact, elected officials dominated the panels, all sorts of them, but other than those I've mentioned, of the lawmakers in attendance, few have been directly involved in creating the very reforms that caused more than a few communities and states to turn around their schools.

I voiced my displeasure at the program before, and many quietly chastised the program that day, but that's not the way to get invited back. Perhaps the value of convening in itself is just a good thing, but I'll offer a bit of curriculum on how a summit in Reagan's name should have gone, because it's summer, and you have some time on your hands, right? So, go back and read one of Reagan's more than 60 speeches on the subject which were anything but conciliatory. Read *A Nation at Risk*. In 1983, within days of that report's release, President Reagan told us, "Our education system, once the finest in the world, is in a sorry state of disrepair...13 percent of our 17-year olds are functionally illiterate, and among minority students it's close to 40 percent. More than two-thirds of high school students can't write an essay."

Guess what? It hasn't changed much! It will remind you why we must never, never, never quit. NEVER. (Check out NAEP scores too if you need a jolt... \*See *related story*)

Perhaps next year the Institute would like the expertise of a Reagan appointee who worked on those same flaws and has led an organization like CER for 25 years. 😊



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## WHAT'S INNOVATION ANYWAY? CER after 25...

“Innovation.” It’s not doing the same thing...A social innovation is often defined as a novel solution to a social problem that is more effective, sustainable, or just better than existing solutions for which the value accrues primarily to society...That’s what EdReform was all about—but is it still innovative? We think there’s so much more we can and should do than we all have, and in better, more interesting, novel ways as we’ve discussed here and elsewhere. We must be innovative in our policy work, in the practice and in the deployment of technology to accelerate learning, and so much more.

That’s why we are celebrating our Silver Anniversary with a commitment to building a new **Road to Innovation for ONE America**. That’s the theme of **CER’s Silver Anniversary Summit, which will take place October 25-26, 2018** on Brickell Key in Miami, Florida, to be followed by the celebratory gala. You can cavort with the masters, the education entrepreneurs who have and are making it happen, like GSV’s Michael Moe, CER’s vice chair and our strategic partner for the gala and the leadership of Arizona State University, which is ramping up for its 10th anniversary summit in April in San Diego.

You’ll see and hear from the leaders of Whittle School & Studios, EdX, ReThink Education, University Ventures, StartED, Charter Schools USA and the pioneers, like Lisa Graham Keegan, Howard Fuller, Education Secretary Rod Paige and so many others.

Please join us in putting a PIN on the map of EdReform and taking us all toward a bigger, better vision for Education Innovation across America. Until Miami...

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## LAST BUT NOT LEAST, THE MEDIA...

We still love it and work very, very hard to take our message to people beyond our computers and walls and communities, and what better way to do that than through the press. Your CER puts a lot of stock not just into national press where we help to drive stories, rebut the B.S. and challenge people to account for what they say in the papers or report. But we adore the local home town papers and radio shows because – guess what? People are paying attention there because these issues matter to the average American! Here’s just a snippet of what we’ve done so far this year, to remind you that while you may not be seeing us on Prime time TV, our fingerprints are all over the “mediums’ that are driving information and news to communities everywhere.

- **Calling on NBC to account.** In mid-May we got word that NBC was preparing to air a piece which was going to show charter schools in Georgia were causing “white flight” and a “return to school segregation.” Hmmm, we thought, and upon further investigation discovered that the story had been prompted by the Hechinger Report – a notoriously biased report that regularly draws attention to itself by conducting data “analysis” (or, you might say, “butchery”) that reaches dire conclusions based on inflammatory “findings”. To address the problem, we had a sit down in New York City with the producer of the program to explain the error of Hechinger’s ways, and also put him in touch with research experts who provided an advanced course on statistics. Then we barraged him with data and resources *The upshot:* the story was delayed and when it was finally aired, it was a fraction of what it could have been. Even better, CER was able to prep the movement to move quickly in response and challenged NBC when it aired repeatedly. The story’s impact was muted.
- **Informing the public.** More than 300 news outlets around the country, print, online and broadcast, were influenced by CER’s aggressive megaphone about the union-initiated strikes in Arizona and other states, so much so that our narrative, that this was about their antagonism to educational choice and not pay for teachers was the lead headline in the story that was picked up! The reporter cited CER’s work and titled her initial piece *“More than money: School vouchers also irk Arizona teachers”*. It was picked up by the *Washington Post* and *New York Times*! By getting out in front of the union story and educating the public, CER demonstrated its ability to reach millions with creative, effective and accurate analysis.

- **Our original op-eds** were picked up by more than 2 dozen major papers nationwide, including 3 states with fastest growing populations, *Dallas Morning News*, the *Las Vegas Review Journal*, and the *NC Herald Sun*.
- **EdTech Digest and EdTech Times.** I was thrilled to be included in EdTech Digest's top 100 ed tech experts, and do an in-depth interview with EdTech Times, among many of the PR efforts under at CER to stimulate thought around innovative solutions.
- **110 Million.** That's how many households, eyeballs and impressions we've scored this year on all manner of issues, and the summer isn't over yet!

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**\*JOLT.** Not to stir any discontentment, but all citizens really should be aware of the pathetic state of American education circa 2018. When your beach partner or barbecue neighbor starts talking about how excited they are for their child's new school, granddaughter's impending entry into senior year or what have you, just keep in mind that no income or race is without some stain of mis-education. To wit:

- NAEP scores saw no significant change from the prior 2015 assessment, save for a lone-point increase in 8th grade math scores. Other depressing lowlights: READING PROFICIENCY or ABOVE: for 4th graders - 37 percent; for 8th graders - 36 percent. MATH PROFICIENCY or ABOVE: for 4th graders - 40 percent; for 8th graders - 34 percent. Proficiency in math declined in ten states. And the lowest performing students in the nation are faring worse than they did on the same assessment in 2015.
- These scores are a sobering reminder that we remain a nation at risk, with far too many children and young adults poorly educated, unprepared to enter college or the workforce, and ultimately, unable to achieve the American Dream of living a rewarding, prosperous life.

**Making the Rounds on Capitol Hill.** It's a funny place. Work there consists of a lot of milling around, meetings and conversations, punctuated by brief spasms of action, followed by lots of milling around, meetings, and conversations. The weird thing is, it's in the millings and meetings where most things get accomplished. Hence, CER has been working, especially this session of Congress, to bring new ideas and solid sense to the conversations that will, eventually, spark spasms of action.

CER's unique and revamped approach to fusing innovation and opportunity in our aggressive advocacy to lawmakers has achieved enormous progress, despite well-funded and increasingly aggressive opposition from teachers' unions, the education establishment and defenders of the status quo. We've been a respected leader and unifying force for an extraordinary national effort that reaches lawmakers on Capitol Hill and in key battleground states. A short list of some of our successes includes:

- We're continuing to develop a model rural-education initiative that can be replicated from state to state to bring innovation and choices to people who have little of either. We're piloting the idea in rural North Carolina, and can't wait to tell you more when we communicate later this fall or before, if you want to find time to connect prior... [jeanneallen@edreform.com](mailto:jeanneallen@edreform.com))
- We are collaboratively promoting personalized learning, which puts mastery of subject matter, not time on task, at the center of the learning process. And in April, CER organized the first-ever Capitol Hill meeting to focus the attention of legislative and policy people on competency based, learner-centered education – and the equation we've been promoting since 2016: Innovation PLUS Opportunity = Results.
- You are, no doubt, aware of the great win that we and colleagues helped advance in gaining passage of a 529 Tax Credit program that now includes qualified K-12 expenses and apprenticeships. **Yes to 529 expansion...but more is needed.** The problem is, even with the 529 expansion, setting aside the money to take advantage of the plan simply is not a reality for most Americans, so...
- We developed and are now engaged in educating our friends, policymakers and the media to encourage Congress to adopt CER's Education, Workforce and Apprenticeship Tax Credit Act (now introduced as the **USA Workforce & Apprenticeship Bill**). This would encourage charitable donations to nonprofit organizations to ensure scholarships go to students at every level for new choices if they happen to be in K-12, for community-based apprenticeships, technical training, workforce development, and educational preparedness for adults.

Not to stir any discontentment, but all citizens really should be aware of the pathetic state of American education circa 2018. When your beach partner or barbecue neighbor starts talking about how excited they are for their child's new school, granddaughter's impending entry into senior year or what have you, just keep in mind that no income or race is without some stain of mis-education. To wit:

**LAWS MATTER.** In an ideal world we wouldn't have to rank states' charter school laws – all states would have a law and they would all be excellent, providing for funding, flexibility, innovation, independence, growth and all the great things that charters deliver. But we don't live in an ideal world. Hence, **CER's 22<sup>nd</sup> annual National Charter School Laws Ranking and Scorecard**. If we lived in an ideal world we would also see dramatic improvements in charter laws from year to year which would be reflected in our rankings. But we don't live in an ideal world. Hence, the 2018 rankings, now reflecting a measure of whether states are continuing to innovate, showed little progress in growing and expanding innovative diverse options for kids. Thus, we battle on, striving for the ideal by providing the rankings as a guide for legislators, policymakers and advocates to do better.

To help the process along, this year's compendium provided case studies showing how regulations and other aspects of poorly conceived charter school policies impact charter operators, students, and families. We also included a model charter school law produced in cooperation with the *American Legislative Exchange Council* that provides language that legislators can use to ensure that states don't set charter schools up to fail before they start. Laws are only the first step in growing a successful state charter sector. But without the right start—language that provides real autonomy in exchange for accountability for outcomes—charter schools don't have a chance.

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**Did you miss your Spring Occasional Letter to Friends?** We did too! We were busy leading celebrations of National Charter Schools Week, toiling in rural communities, pounding the marble floors of Capitol Hill (one day we did 10,000 steps in the Russell Senate Office Building alone!). We have made decisions regularly to put the most important stuff first, and much as I love writing and we all love bragging on our friends and colleagues and the people who are magnificently helping children and families get a leg up on life, we just couldn't take swing the spring newsletter!

Hopefully this expanded letter has filled your hearts and mind with enough until we can communicate again in this wonderfully traditional and nostalgic way - e.g., paper and the written word! Please take a moment to show us your appreciation however, because none of what you've read and what you see daily in your communities and the papers can happen without money, including the time this takes. You know that, of course, but CER is unique in the field in that no major foundations are writing 7 figure checks to sustain us, and we rely on a few 6 figure, several 5 figure and hundreds of 3-4 figure checks to make education opportunity and innovation happen for millions of students.

It's a bargain and the best investment you'll make this year. Let me say thank you, in advance, for writing that check, or going online at [www.edreform.com/donate](http://www.edreform.com/donate).

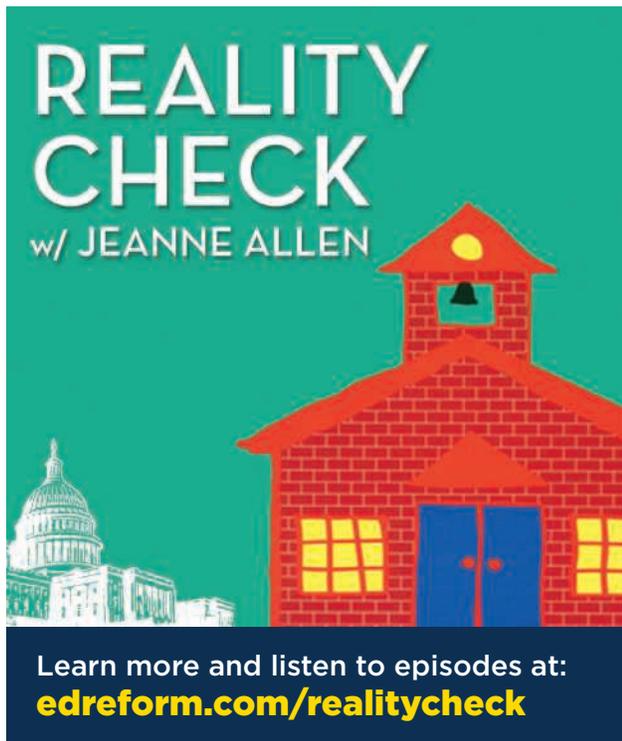
And don't' forget, you can help as well by joining us in Miami at the beautiful Mandarin Oriental, where we've negotiated great deals, and have a program to beat the band that will stimulate dozens more new innovations, collaborations and critical changes that must occur to restore excellence to education and drive economic prosperity for millions more Americans.

Until then, wishing you a beautiful summer's end, and praying for God's blessings on you and all you cherish.

All the best,



Jeanne Allen  
Founder & CEO



Listen to *Reality Check w/Jeanne Allen*, our newly scheduled podcast produced by CER with National Review Online. It's an ongoing series of lively, engaging podcasts covering anything and everything having to do with education. Here are a few highlights of our *Reality Check* interviews to date:

**HOWARD FULLER**, educational choice pioneer. "We need to focus on the one thing that we can come together on, and a lot of the other things fall in place."

**MICHAEL BLOCK**, co-founder (& his wife Olga) of the international network of BASIS Schools.

**JOHN KATZMAN**, one of the nation's leading experts in higher education.

Education Secretary **BETSY DEVOS**, Senator **TED CRUZ**, and House members **PAUL MITCHELL**, **VIRGINIA FOXX** and **LUKE MESSER** – all on hand as part of National School Choice Week celebrations. "We need to free up and empower parents to make choices for their children. This is imperative for our country's health and well-being." - DeVos

**GERARD ROBINSON**, executive director of the Center for Advancing Opportunity.

**MARK MIX**, pres. of the National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation, which represented Mark Janus

**CARL SCHRAMM**, former president and CEO of the Kauffman Foundation, and author of the book "Burn the Business Plan."

**JOHN SCHILLING**, president and CEO of the American Federation for Children.

**ROBERT PONDISCIO**, senior fellow and vice president for external affairs at the Thomas B. Fordham Institute.

**MATT GREENFIELD**, managing partner of ReThink Education, a venture capital firm focused on educational technology. "What we need to do when we personalize is ask the question, who is this child? What is she passionate about? What does she want to do?"

**LENORE SKENAZY**, author of the book and blog "Free-Range Kids."

**LAURA SANDEFUR**, co-founder of Acton Academy. "Let's dream up our dream school." – the school that would launch our children into the world fully equipped to find their calling and change the world."

**EVA MOSKOWITZ**, charter school crusader and CEO of Success Academy Network. "If we wanted to do what was best for children, it seems improbable that we would come up with the 800 pages of the teachers' union contract..."

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