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Vol. 6, No. 16 CHARTER SCHOOLS DEATH BY REFERENDUM. Last week, the **Washington Teachers Union** (WEA) kicked off its signature drive to overturn the Evergreen State's less-than-a-month-old charter law. Their goal is to gather the 98,867 signatures by June 2 in order to put the referendum on the November ballot. WEA launched its effort just prior to the Washington Charter School weekend conference in Seattle that brought national charter school leaders together to address those interested in starting a charter school. Click here to read more from a [Seattle Times editorial](#). **A DOUBLE WHAMMY.** As the **Massachusetts** legislature tries to ward off a charter school moratorium, parents arrived in the state capital to show their support for charters. But now, even charter supporters are trying to buy-off opponents by giving them "impact aid," in other words, money for students they lose...a formula that not only rewards districts for not educating kids but is sure to rile concerned taxpayers as well. **A CHANCE FOR THE LONE STAR STATE TO SHINE.** **Texas** Governor Rick Perry has called the long-anticipated special legislative session to begin Tuesday to discuss overhauling the state's school finance system. This session is an opportunity for legislators to expand charter school autonomy and funding as well as to promote legislation that would introduce a pilot school choice program for low-income students. Charter advocates promise to advance legislation to achieve equity in facilities funding in keeping with Perry's desire to direct additional funding to schools which demonstrate high student achievement. Although reformers are optimistic that Perry and the legislature will have the drive necessary to push through important changes, anti-reform officials are already out in force condemning so-called "risky voucher schemes." For more, go to the [Dallas Morning News](#). **SCHOOL CHOICE CHOICE LIFTS ALL BOATS.** In her recently released study on some of the longest running public school choice programs in the US, including Milwaukee's, noted Harvard economist Caroline Hoxby argues that the scholarships are having a positive effect on public schools in the area by forcing them to compete for students and finances. Hoxby observes that since the cap on the percentage of the program's recipients was raised in 1998, from 1 percent to 15 percent of district enrollment, the scholarships have generated real competition among schools and their administrators, with schools battling to keep kids enrolled. In even better news, this competition has caused across-the-board test score gains in science, language and math among Milwaukee public school students. For more on a study that shows how choice really spurs on achievement for school districts, go to [Education Next](#). **TESTING CALCULATORS OFF.** The use of **calculators** by elementary-age students is the subject of a new analysis by Tom Loveless of the Brown Center on Education Policy at the Brookings Institution. The analysis concludes that, "If students are only able to compute accurately with calculators—or if their computational skills are so weak that only the simplest of calculations can be made—then students are doomed to solving only trivial mathematical problems." Loveless analyzed National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores of those students who were allowed to use calculators and those who weren't. In looking at scores of nine-year olds, he found that calculators change everything. "For a large number of nine year olds, when calculators are available on computational items [children] get correct answers, when calculators are not available, they get wrong answers." Loveless also found that: in subtraction, students scored 89.2 percent with calculators and 59.7 without; in multiplication, 87.9 percent with calculators and 42.5 without; and in division, 77.1 percent with and 48.3 without. The report concludes that, "allowing fourth graders to use calculators on items that are intended to assess computational skills will produce misleading results—misleading, that is, if one assumes that knowing how to compute means being able to make calculations without technological assistance." For more on the report, go to [The Brookings Institution](#). **HAPPY 30th!** One of the nation's leading children's magazines, **Cricket**, celebrates its 30th Anniversary this year. According to founder and Editor-in Chief Marianne Carus, "The way to create in children a love of reading and an appreciation of good writing is to offer them beautifully illustrated, lively, well-written, interesting stories, sustaining a witty tone and a sense of humor. I am convinced that children will respond to quality if it's not forced upon them, but presented in an engaging manner." For more, go to <http://www.cricketmag.com>. **In other News** • Later this week the State Board in **Tennessee** will review three charter applications, including one for a KIPP school that was sent to them after being denied by the Nashville school board. • Legislators in **New Hampshire** are hoping that the third time's a charm as they again consider a school choice measure that would enable low-income families to send their children to private schools. Senate Finance Chair Dick Green feels this bill has a better chance of passing as the money for the program will come directly from the state rather than cities or towns. **NATIONAL CHARTER SCHOOLS WEEK** **Visit a Charter School Today May 3-7 is National Charter Schools Week** and CER plans to release the latest in the *Charter Schools Today: Changing the Face of American Education* series. This newest edition will look at *Statistics, Stories and Insights*. To celebrate the work and effectiveness of charters, we now bring you some charter success stories from communities around the country. Link here for more on [National](#)



[Charter Schools Week](#). **Charter School Successes** The **Colorado** Department of Education named **Ridgeview Classical School's** high school program the second best in the state in its 2001-2002 School Accountability Report (SAR). The SAR rankings are determined by using each school's scores on the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) exams. Ridgeview excelled compared to other schools in the Poudre School District with 96 percent of its 9th- and 10th-graders scoring at proficient or advanced, 85 percent at proficient or advanced in writing, and 62 percent at proficient or advanced in math – beating district averages at every level. The K-12 school combines Core Knowledge and Great Books curricula and methodology. Despite coming from some of **Connecticut's** toughest neighborhoods, students in the fifth through eighth grade of **Amistad Academy** in **New Haven** surpassed the statewide average in writing and math on the Connecticut Mastery Test, widely considered to be among the country's most challenging series of tests. This group of students, 100 percent of whom are Black and Latino and 87 percent of whom qualified for free or reduced lunch, significantly outperformed New Haven Public School (NHPS) students in every subject, and more than doubled the NHPS scores in math and writing, despite NHPS' serving an identical student population.

