



Newsire - November 22, 2005

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Vol. 7, No. 47 ACHIEVEMENT D'OH. Washington-area residents woke up to *Washington Post* coverage of a new study issued by a group called EdSource. The immediate outreach to *CER Newsire* from a parent of Maryland public school children was so on target that it is offered here for your consideration: "Obviously I haven't read the EdSource study, so I don't know precisely how they frame the issue, but here's how the *Post* presented it: the front page teaser says: 'A study of low-income schools finds such factors as experienced teachers influence student achievement more than parental involvement, sparking a national debate.' Inside, the four-column headline reads: 'Parents' Effect on Achievement Shaky.' "It seems to me, however, that what the study in fact found is that *schools' efforts to TEACH children are more important to student achievement than SCHOOLS' EFFORTS to involve parents* As Homer Simpson would say, 'D'oh!' "Do people really think parental involvement and schools' interaction with parents are the same thing? Do people really have such a paternalistic view of schools, and such a low opinion of parents, as to think that unless parents join the PTA and collect change at the bake sale, they're not involved in their child's education? And are schools so ready to abdicate their education responsibility as to blame low student achievement on low turn-out at Back-to-School night, rather than what actually happens in the classroom? As my 8 year old son was quickly able to point out after I briefly, and barely, framed the issue, parents could boycott the school by pulling their kids out and homeschooling them, and that, in fact, is parent involvement. "I didn't know how naive I was, to find that it is not in fact self-evident that schools' efforts to teach students are more important than their efforts to get parents involved (read 'fundraise,' if you ask me). Apparently, that concept is up for national debate. Meanwhile, the study also found that ... wait for it ... a coherent, standards-base curriculum and 'prioritizing student achievement' ARE important to student learning. Positive correlation - who knew? (Besides my 8 year old.) Sheesh. "The real crying shame is that we needed a study to tell us (or at least the media and the Blob) these 'newsflashes' - and the media missed the point anyway. I could 'blog' on this forever, but time to get involved in my child's education and make sure my son doesn't miss the bus." **CHOICE AD NAUSEUM.** How did the Dayton Public Schools spend \$234,162 last year?



Turkey

- a) Renovation on public school buildings.
- b) Implementation of new testing and teacher evaluation methods.
- c) Advertising to keep students from leaving for successful charter schools.
- d) Hiring Steven Spielberg to direct school Thanksgiving pageants.

If you said C, then sadly, you would be correct. From Dayton, Ohio to Haverhill, Massachusetts, public schools are spending big money to keep students from leaving public schools in favor of charters. According to a story in the [Dayton Daily News](#), Dayton Public Schools has spent more than a half-million dollars in three years on television, radio, newspaper and billboard advertising. As the [Boston Globe](#) reported, Haverhill Public Schools spent \$13,000 last year in newspaper and television advertising. While seemingly small, spending money on public relations to solve an education problem is like buying a fun-house mirror to slim down your physique. The competitive juices are obviously flowing in these districts to some extent, but the evidence suggests that it is change, not PR, that will bring those kids back. **CHARTERS CELEBRITY STATUS.** Are you a visiting dignitary planning a trip to Washington, DC? You'll probably want to visit a charter school. Prince Charles and Camilla visited the School for Educational Evolution and Development (SEED); The Dalai Lama went to The Booker T. Washington Public Charter School for the Technical Arts. As a [Washington Examiner](#) editorial noticed, "charter schools are now the de facto face of the District's public education system—and it's high time that local education officials admitted it." But debate at the DC Public Schools Master Education Plan Community Forum revealed that, despite their popularity, DC public school



officials and many parents still need an education on charter schools. “Charter schools are just taking money away from public schools,” said a parent at the forum. “Charter schools are public schools too—don’t forget—paid for by the taxpayers,” a well-informed parent quickly offered. To which the DC Public Schools representative responded, “We can’t stop charter schools, we have to learn to work with them.” Amen.IN CONTEXT. The review by Hoover Institution scholar Dr. Henry I. Miller of a new book on Downtown College Prep puts the whole issue in context. Addressing common misconceptions that the San Jose charter school debunks, Miller notes that a charter school doesn’t take money away from public schools, but instead “siphons off many difficult, under-performing students. They are the least likely to attend public schools regularly or to graduate—and require expensive services from traditional schools. So the financial burden on the district... is minimal.” Dr. Miller goes on to discuss how successful charters can help all schools. “Will charter schools force traditional schools to change? Let’s hope so, if only by embarrassing them with success. Certainly if non-charter public schools are forced to compete for students, they will have to improve simply to survive.”UNIVERSITY OPPORTUNITIES. From parents to legislators, Wisconsin’s citizens are calling for more educational options. A bill in the Assembly would follow the proven success of states like Michigan and New York by making the president of the University of Wisconsin system a charter school authorizer. “We as legislators often talk about reforming education, expanding the educational opportunities to Wisconsin’s families and educating our children to compete in a global economy,” said Dean Cady from the office of State Representative Leah Vukmir. “That is precisely what Assembly Bill 768 does; it expands the educational opportunities now available to families located in one region of the state to parents and children living in Dane County.” If approved, the bill would take effect in 2007. In Green County, a similar charter school movement is being spearheaded by local parent activist Lisa Kivirist. Her plan, still in the early stages, would create the Green County Elementary Charter School. Stay tuned for updates. UNIONS DON’T BLAME US. A collective call for more accountability in education doesn’t seem to faze the teachers unions. Instead they are shirking any responsibility and taking an “it wasn’t us” approach to recent bad news. According to a report by the New Teacher Project, teacher union contracts are protecting ineffective teachers in big cities and placing tenure and seniority ahead of the needs of students and schools. A new report reveals that in five large school systems across the country, union rules have allowed poor-performing teachers to be shuffled from school to school rather than being fired. How did the union respond to the damaging news? They blamed everyone else. “I think it’s another smoke screen to blame union rules for our society’s lack of commitment to children,” Reg Weaver, president of

