

Paul Begala Sounds Off on Leadership

If I were still in the business of advising politicians—which I’m not—I’d tell them to draw sharp distinctions on education issues rather than run around mouthing platitudes. Education is not some Star Wars weapon system that needs a bunch of experts to say whether or not it’s working. Voters know what works in education and are looking for candidates who will talk straight and set clear priorities.

There’s not a politician in the world who can be all things to all people. But they try, and that’s the problem. Education proposals tailored to reach the widest possible audience end up being nothing more than political pablum. Better to demonstrate resolve, and a willingness to slay a few sacred cows, than to be so Milquetoasty that voters conclude you don’t stand for anything.

Voters are looking for public officials who will commit to the hard work of real reform: hiring, retaining, and paying teachers...of a quality we’re willing to bet our future on, and in numbers that will significantly reduce class size. The public knows these things aren’t free, so public officials should be up-front about the costs and spell out how such reforms are going to be paid for.

Leadership requires specificity. Even when offering something not all voters agree with, politicians score points for being specific. The oldest saying in politics is “Money talks, ____ walks.” If hot air could solve our education needs, every schoolchild in America would be lining up for a Nobel Prize.

Since we’re now at war, I think a comparison to how we approach another serious national issue is useful. Nobody says, “We’ve spent trillions on defense yet we still have enemies.” But certain politicians are forever blathering on about how “We’ve spent billions on education and schools still aren’t good enough.” No kidding!

Too many politicians take the easy way out on education, proposing silver-bullet solutions. Take vouchers, for instance. I don’t know of a single voucher proposal that’s ever won a referendum at the state or local level, which is a testament to the great good sense of the American people. They know we don’t have enough money to provide excellence to everyone in our public education system as it is. So the notion that the way to fix public schools is to spend more money on private schools is nonsensical. We don’t say we’re going to improve the Navy by spending more money on the Army.

Maybe politicians are finally getting the message. When an anti-government, anti-Washington president like George W. Bush signs an education bill written by Senator Edward Kennedy, you know something’s getting through. But education advocates have to get tougher, not be so namby-pamby. Defense contractors speak as if the fate of the nation depended on their products, and it does. Why don’t education advocates convey

that same sense of importance and urgency when we know to a certainty that their “products” will *absolutely* determine the fate of our nation?

The Bible says there will be no end to troubles in this world. Some people look at our schools and throw up their hands. I look at them and roll up my sleeves. So when it comes to politicians, ask yourself which one is going to do whatever it takes to improve our schools with the same commitment of resources that we all agree we need to win the war on terrorism. Bottom line: “No dough, no go.”

Paul Begala is a research professor of government and public policy at Georgetown University, a political consultant, and a speechwriter who, along with James Carville, devised the strategy behind Bill Clinton’s 1992 campaign. Begala and Carville now co-host CNN’s *Crossfire*, squaring off against conservatives Robert Novak and Tucker Carlson.

Designing Public Schools: A Blueprint for Success

CONNECTIONS: Looking at the schools that were built in the late 19th century, do you think we did more for our kids with architecture then than we do today?

MR. BINGLER: Buildings are a manifestation of things; they represent principles and attitudes. The attitudes and principles of public education 100 years ago were very different from what they are today. You can tell by looking at the buildings, they were done with greater care and pride.

One hundred years ago, a lot more attention was paid to integration of community resources. The auditorium was a neighborhood auditorium, the gymnasium a neighborhood gymnasium. I say “neighborhood” because it was very unusual in those days to see a 3,000-student school. Schools were connected to neighborhoods, not to cities or regions.

CONNECTIONS: Many beautiful historical school buildings are in need of repair. If you had a choice between building a new school or reclaiming an old building, which would you choose?

MR. BINGLER: Some old public schools can be reconfigured, but many times it’s a question of whether these facilities work for current education standards, especially when you consider issues of flexibility and technology. Flexibility is a problem with big brick buildings. It’s hard to move bricks.

But whenever we can save these buildings—whether as public schools or not—we should. New facilities usually don’t have the same elegance and nobility. However, I firmly believe that modern architecture and new facilities can have the same level of

sophistication and commitment as historical buildings do, provided we are willing to make some changes in public design standards and in expectations.

CONNECTIONS: How does the architecture of schools enrich or detract from student learning?

MR. BINGLER: Well, I can only partially answer that question since I'm an architect, not an educator. But I've been hanging around educators for a long time now and I've learned a lot about what they consider essential.

Delivery of education through lecture still happens, but it happens a lot less. Today there is greater emphasis on integrated learning and on project-based learning. So, from a planning and architectural point of view, there are a couple of ways to approach the new ideas about teaching and learning. One is big-picture planning—the view from 30,000 feet—things like where schools are located and how big they should be. For example, certain kinds of learning take place better in small schools than in big schools. There's a certain kind of parental interaction that takes place in a neighborhood school that doesn't take place in a 3,000-student school located on the other side of town. These are planning issues that dramatically impact education options.

The second has to do with the design of the buildings themselves, and here flexibility is key. Schools built in the '50s—the ones with 900-square-foot classrooms down a double-loaded corridor—are the opposite of flexible. They are very, very directive in terms of how learning takes place. The best examples of flexible schools are those with a variety of room sizes or with flexible walls that break up spaces for small- or large-group interaction.

CONNECTIONS: Are you still seeing a tendency toward big schools in mega buildings?

MR. BINGLER: I was optimistic that the tide was turning and that more and more people were beginning to acknowledge the value of smaller schools. However, the Los Angeles Unified School District is rethinking the possibility of opening the Belmont School, a 5,000-student high school now on hold for environmental reasons. That's very discouraging. Plus President Bush's new budget eliminated funding for smaller learning communities. There was \$142 million in last year's budget to take big high schools and break them into smaller learning communities. That money's gone.

CONNECTIONS: What's the cost variable in building smaller, more flexible schools?

MR. BINGLER: If you compare difference in cost to difference in performance, the variable can be negligible. In fact, small schools are not necessarily more expensive. Think about the cost of land alone, especially in cities. One 12-acre school site in Los Angeles costs \$40 million. That's a lot of money to spend on a piece of land. There are a lot more 2- or 3- or 4-acre sites in the inner city than there are 12- or 15- or 20-acre sites. It can be less expensive to build smaller schools.

CONNECTIONS: What other factors should be used in making building decisions?

MR. BINGLER: The authentic economics of these decisions. Some people say we must build big schools because we can't afford an extra principal or another calculus teacher. Frankly, in the next year or two, I think we will see those arguments lose a lot of support.

The cost of educating a child runs about \$5,800 a year. Larger schools have higher dropout rates, especially at the high school level, but student retention is never factored in when deciding whether it's cheaper or more expensive to build large schools versus small schools. If a child drops out, that doesn't save \$5,800 a year—it ends up costing an average of \$20,000 to \$35,000 a year. But those figures aren't in the calculations because they come from the criminal justice system budget.

CONNECTIONS: Who makes these planning decisions?

MR. BINGLER: Usually, school boards. And most of those school boards are made up of well-meaning people who really want to do things right. What happens, though, is they sometimes only look at one piece of the puzzle.

I can't tell you how many times school boards end up making decisions about where to locate a school because the land's cheaper. Or because some construction manager says he can build a bigger school for \$6 a square foot less than a smaller school. Or a real estate developer who wants to build houses outside of town says, "We'll give you the land free."

School boards have a fiduciary responsibility to taxpayers, so they opt for the less expensive route. But, because they've only looked at one piece of the puzzle, the money they save on land or on construction costs can be miniscule compared to transportation costs, retention issues, and access issues.

Think about this: We build these huge schools, and then we bus the students, but we don't bus the parents. Many poor parents don't have cars and can't get to school easily. Research tells us that parental engagement is one of the most important criteria for improving student achievement. But architects and planners are designing systems that make parental involvement more and more difficult. Many of the things that we know help to improve student achievement are actually being designed out of the system.

CONNECTIONS: Do you see privatization as an encroaching threat? You mentioned land development co-opting decisions. Is there anything else you're concerned about?

MR. BINGLER: We all have to be concerned about the commercialization of public space. That goes for everything from advertising to what I call "chain link" privatization. Chain link fences exist partly in response to fear and security issues and partly for control. To the degree that control goes out of the hands of the public into the hands of a private entity, it diminishes the public's access to its public space.

The flip side of this, which I'm very encouraged about, is that private entities are recognizing that we can't expect the public school system to do everything. There's the Zoo School in Minneapolis, a private school located on zoo grounds where students use the zoo's environmental and physical resources to extend their learning environment. There's also the Henry Ford Academy in Dearborn, MI, where 400 students go to school every day in the Henry Ford Museum. It's a great model of integration and costs about 25 percent of what it would have cost to buy land and build a school.

Another example is the Met Center in Providence, RI, where, every Tuesday and Thursday, students do project-based learning in association with a mentor. If the kids are interested in medicine, they intern at a hospital. If they like to cook, they intern with a chef. Then there's the school in Littleton, NH, where they've relocated the marketing program into the basement of the general store on Main Street. These kids are getting an immersion in marketing, not from a textbook, but from real life. These ways of connecting the private sector to the public function of education are very encouraging.

CONNECTIONS: Are there other areas of architecture and planning that schools can use as models?

MR. BINGLER: One model I would point to is smart growth. There are so many good ideas in the smart growth movement that have to do with rebuilding inner cities so that we stop eating up green fields and building more and longer transportation systems. Smart growth looks at cleaning up brown fields and toxic sites so that the cost of developing inner cities becomes more competitive with the cost of developing suburbs.

CONNECTIONS: You describe architecture as a process of conceiving, planning, rebuilding. Can you explain what that means and talk about the role of community in this process?

MR. BINGLER: It gets back to the notion of flexibility. The best way to get flexibility in community design is to get as many opinions and ideas as possible. We live with the products of experts who've designed our cities and our schools, and my take is that a lot of these experts haven't done so well. It's a humbling experience to realize how little experts know; they need to get educated about education by listening to teachers, students, parents, and businesspeople.

There's a big debate right now about participation. Nobody says, "I don't believe in participation." But what does participation really mean? Does it mean a public hearing? Does it mean that experts go off in a corner, do some homework, come back with a design, present it to the public, and the public gives it a thumbs up or a thumbs down?

Communities have become skeptical of the public hearing process. They have attended too many meetings where they reviewed some concept, gave their opinion, and then were ignored. They're called in after all the decisions have been made and are told, "Here's where the school's going to be located and here's a beautiful picture of it. Hope you like

it.” At that point, who’s going to stand up and say, “I think we need four small schools instead of this one big school”?

So I believe this is an issue of public engagement, not one of public participation. Public participation is too easy to get around. We have to make a commitment to both listen to and engage the public in the decision-making process—which to me seems a lot more like democracy. Thomas Jefferson said that the cornerstone of democracy is the goodness and wisdom of the common people. There’s no one I’ve ever met—rich, poor, Latino, Caucasian, or anything else—who doesn’t want something better for their kids. And where we’ve gotten off base is not so much in the architecture, or in the curriculum, or in the planning, but in the values of the democratic process, in what *public* means in a much larger sense.

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School Reform: Sizzle vs. Substance

By Congressman Chaka Fattah

Last December, the state of Pennsylvania and my hometown of Philadelphia agreed to transfer control of the city’s 264 public schools to a city/state commission. In March, the commission named Edison Schools Inc., a for-profit company, as its lead consultant and gave the firm broad authority to decide how Philadelphia schools will be run and staffed in the future.

Everyone agrees that Philadelphia’s schools are in need of significant improvement, as are many other schools in impoverished urban and rural communities across America. But the problem in Philadelphia is not due to a failure in education leadership. The real problem is the ever-widening, nationwide opportunity gap that keeps children living in urban and rural low-income communities from receiving the same high-quality public education that students in more fortunate communities can take for granted.

Handing public schools over to Edison offers false hope. It is the sizzle of reform without the substance of reform. Changing school governance or school management means nothing unless all students have equal access to quality resources. All schoolchildren deserve the basics of a quality education: qualified teachers, smaller classes, rigorous academic standards, educational technology, up-to-date school libraries and textbooks, and good school counselors.

But when one group of children consistently gets the best teachers, the latest textbooks, and the most challenging curriculum, while another group of children consistently does

not, then we should not be surprised at the inevitable results. If we truly want *all* students to achieve worldclass results, then we must give *all* students worldclass schools.

Poor schools cannot begin to compete for the best teachers or for the best resources. The city of Philadelphia, for example, gets \$2,000 less per pupil than the average suburban school district in Pennsylvania. Some of the wealthier Philadelphia suburbs spend almost \$10,000 more per student than the city does, yet the needs of the urban students are often far greater than those of their more advantaged suburban peers. Chemistry labs in Chicago schools have no microscopes or lab equipment, while chemistry labs in Chicago's suburban schools have state-of-the-art equipment. Only 123 high school students in Baltimore took advanced placement (AP) courses last year; in nearby suburban Montgomery County, MD, some 5,000 students took AP courses. Students at Beverly Hills High School in California can choose from 21 AP courses but, only 30 minutes away at inner-city Compton High School, only one AP course is offered.

Some of my colleagues in Congress say that when it comes to education, money really doesn't matter. Well, if money doesn't matter, let's equalize it. Let's provide all children with an equal education opportunity and then judge the results. But let's not continue to allow ZIP codes to dictate the quality of education our children receive.

Pennsylvania's for-profit "cure" for Philadelphia's public schools largely overlooks the question of comparable educational opportunity. The state contends that Philadelphia's problems stem from waste and mismanagement and that private sector managers would be more efficient. But the real problem is inadequate funding: City schools can't possibly waste dollars they never had in the first place.

Furthermore, Edison's track record is cause for alarm. The overwhelming majority of schools managed by the company perform poorly, in many cases even worse than the Philadelphia schools they propose to fix. My office analyzed student scores from 69 schools in 20 states and the District of Columbia where Edison has a presence. In 61 of those schools, students performed substantially below state standards. In 20 of 32 Edison schools operating in seven states (Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Maryland, Michigan, and Texas), more than 50 percent of the students failed to meet the state standard in math or reading in at least one grade.

Last year, researchers at Western Michigan University concluded that Edison schools produced "mediocre results" and that their students perform "...worse than students in comparable schools." In Massachusetts, an independent state audit found that managers of an Edison-run charter school in Boston could not document how they measured student performance. Edison-operated schools in Baltimore are bucking a citywide trend of rising test scores. An Edison-run charter school in York, PA, is the worst-performing school in that county. School officials in Minneapolis, San Antonio, Trenton, Goldsboro, NC, and Sherman, TX, are canceling contracts with the company, citing Edison's legacy as one of "promises broken, poor performance, and agreements violated."

So policymakers need to think twice before they gamble millions of taxpayer dollars and the futures of thousands of students on questionable for-profit education schemes. America's future cannot be bright if half our young people have everything in the world to look forward to, while the other half can look forward to little or nothing. Spending disparities must be eliminated if we are to give all of our children equal opportunities for success.

A leading advocate for school finance equity, Rep. Chaka Fattah represents Pennsylvania's 2nd Congressional District, which includes parts of Philadelphia and Delaware County. He serves on the House appropriations and administration committees.

Financing School Construction in the 21st Century

Last September, some 350 Washington, DC, students took their seats in the first public school to be built in the nation's capital in 20 years. The new J.F. Oyster Bilingual Elementary School was built at no cost to taxpayers through an innovative partnership that provides a nationwide blueprint for financing school construction.

The partnership was brokered by the 21st Century School Fund, a local civic group dedicated to improving Washington's school facilities. In exchange for the right to build an apartment building on what had been a playing field, a local developer agreed to level and rebuild Oyster, a dilapidated, overcrowded facility built in the 1920s. Construction of the new school, which was completed in June 2001, was financed by an \$11 million tax-exempt city bond issue, which, in lieu of paying property taxes, the developer will repay from revenue generated by the apartments.

"This project shows what is possible when the school district, the city, the community, nonprofit organizations, and the private sector cooperate on behalf of public education," says Paul Vance, superintendent of the District of Columbia Public Schools.

Oyster principal Paquita Holland labeled the old building a barrier to providing high-quality education. "The new building is a far better place for kids to learn." The new school, roughly 80 percent larger than the one it replaced, includes a computer lab, a library/media center, an art room, a gym, space for after-school programs, and classrooms specially designed for the school's nationally recognized, highly popular Spanish-English immersion program.

Mary Filardo, the mother of two Oyster graduates, created the 21st Century School Fund in 1995 for the express purpose of getting Oyster a new building. The group won support from the board of education, the city council, and the mayor. It also obtained startup funding and organizational support from the Ford Foundation, including technical assistance in the planning and management stages and leveraging of the construction funding.

“The government had no idea how to do this and neither did we at first,” Filardo explained. “But after we went to the private sector and were informed that it could work, we were shocked at how easy it would be.” Her group is now working with the DC school district, and other districts nationwide, on school construction projects.

School Construction: A Look at the Numbers

Nationally, more than a third of all schools need replacement or major repairs at an estimated cost of \$322 billion, according to the National Education Association. Yet few school districts have the money and technical expertise to launch major building campaigns. The following data illustrate the dimensions of the problem and the cost of improving the conditions in which students are expected to learn.

- Average age of public schools in the United States: 40 years old
- Estimated costs required for school construction: \$268.2 billion
- Estimated costs required for school repairs and additions: \$127 billion
- Percentage of schools that are overcrowded: 25 percent
- Percentage of schools needing repair: 75 percent
- Number of students attending schools in “less than adequate” condition: 11 million
- Number of students attending schools in “poor” condition: 3.5 million
- Percentage of schools with basic “life safety” problems (e.g., sprinkler systems, fire alarms, emergency exits): 20 percent
- Percentage of schools planning to undertake at least one major repair or renovation project: 41 percent
- Percentage of schools scheduled to be replaced: 25 percent

Sources: *Condition of America’s Public School Facilities: 1999*, National Center for Education Statistics (June 2000); *Modernizing Our Schools: What Will It Cost?*, National Education Association (June 2000).

The Political Realities of Education Leadership

An interview with Governor James B. Hunt, Jr.

CONNECTIONS: In the 1970s and ’80s, a number of key governors—you, Bill Clinton, Tom Kean, Dick Riley, Lamar Alexander—tried to raise the profile of public education at a time when many Americans were pessimistic about America’s schools. What does it take to make people pay attention to education and keep it on the political agenda?

GOVERNOR HUNT: I think the role of leadership is always to share why public schools are so important in supporting families, strengthening the economy, and creating good jobs. A public official has to put education high on the agenda. As governor, I had big charts in every meeting entitled “The Hunt Agenda.” If an issue wasn’t on the agenda, it didn’t get much discussion. Education was always at the top of the agenda; we constantly talked about specific things we were going to do to make education better.

Leaders have to set goals. My last “State of the State” speech was entirely about education—I didn’t say a single word about anything else—and I set forth a goal: “If we can improve test scores in North Carolina in the last decade more than any other state—if we were first in ‘progress’—why don’t we go to the head of the class in the next decade? Let’s make our students and our schools first in America by 2010.” Now, that’s a very clear goal, and I’m glad to say my successor adopted it.

CONNECTIONS: As governor you were instrumental in implementing widely imitated programs in early childhood education, class-size reduction, dropout prevention, and reading and math programs. You’ve been the leading voice for teacher quality for more than a decade. You were an education candidate before the term was ever coined. Now it seems everyone claims to be an education candidate. What does it mean to be an education candidate today?

GOVERNOR HUNT: Being an education candidate means that you make quality public education a top priority, and you understand exactly why it is a top priority. Good candidates have to be excited about education and knowledgeable about the issues. They have to go into the schools regularly and then talk about what they see there; about what administrators, teachers, and students need; and about the successes they discover.

Four decades ago, my friend Terry Sanford talked about quality education, and that was fine, that sent a message. But now we have to talk about specifics: early childhood programs, excellent teachers, very good principals and administrators. We have to talk about having high expectations and setting high standards. We have to talk about measuring results, improving schools that aren’t doing well, and helping children who are falling behind.

When North Carolina was focusing on how to improve teaching, I invited various education leaders to the governor’s mansion. We sat around a big table in the library and developed strategies for raising standards for teachers, for making a master’s degree really meaningful, for helping teachers continue to improve during their careers, for raising pay and making some of it be performance based.

Another big issue in assessing a candidate is a commitment to resources. The public should definitely give high marks to candidates who vote for funding. But they must also pick candidates who will give education a priority with existing funds. When states are cutting back, good education candidates will be out there protecting education budgets instead of agreeing to “cut it all equally” or focusing on other priorities.

CONNECTIONS: You’ve been a governor through good economic times and bad. Given your experience, what do leaders need to do to keep education a recession-proof issue?

GOVERNOR HUNT: It is particularly important to highlight the impact of education on economic growth during times of recession or economic downturn. This is especially true

now, when we're concerned about what's happening in the world and working to make the world a safer place for everyone.

We've got to pound on the relationship between economics and education every single day. Yes, we've got some problems, but the way we deal with them is to educate our people and build a stronger workforce. If we do that, we'll be able to build our economic strength in the future.

Smart people do things that result in more jobs and better company growth. At a ribbon cutting for an advanced micro-devices plant a number of years ago, I was introduced to the guy who developed the technology that enabled a North Carolina company to get the first American contract from Nippon Telephone and Telegraph. We talked about his public school education and his community college degree. I tell this story again and again, making the point that we have to invest in education if we're going to grow jobs and come out of a recession.

CONNECTIONS: Governor, you said the first priority was to make sure candidates know the issues. What are the most important issues that candidates need to know about?

GOVERNOR HUNT: Well, clearly the two most important issues are excellent teachers and administrators, and early childhood education. Next is standing for high standards, having high expectations, and being committed to regular measurement to see how our children are doing. We must commit to step in when kids aren't learning enough, provide additional resources to failing schools, take tough action to change leadership when necessary, and build schools that are safe and caring places. Big factory schools don't work. They're terrible for morale and for public safety...kids don't learn in them, and they drop out of them way too often.

There's also an important place for partnerships—partnerships with families, with businesses, with faith communities—and good leaders ought to think about building those partnerships. When I was putting the Excellent Schools Act through the North Carolina legislature, I said we were going to raise standards for teachers and raise their pay to the national average in the next four years, which would mean going from 43rd in teacher pay to 20th or 21st. The press rushed in and said that this would take an extra billion dollars over the next four years and I said, “Yes, and worth every penny of it.” Then I went out and campaigned for it.

People knew exactly what I was proposing; they liked it, and they supported it. But to get it through, I had the top 13 CEOs in the state, led by the CEO of Bank of America, go before the appropriations committee and testify in favor of the bill. So you have to build those partnerships. Good candidates, good leaders have to be out there speaking to different groups and getting them involved. By the way, we raised that money!

CONNECTIONS: Governors, members of Congress and mayors all have diverse constituencies. What are the issues that bring these different communities together?

GOVERNOR HUNT: Issues surrounding family, children, and the economy are the most unifying. We think first about our families, our children, our grandchildren, their safety. Then we think about our jobs and how we make a living.

Obviously, education is right at the heart of all this. Everything can't be a first priority, but you can weave a lot of things together. Supporting public schools and giving our kids the best possible opportunities relates to the economy, to public safety, to the safety of our families, and all of that has a powerful impact. Frankly, public education—educating people's children—is something that any politician or organization can build enormous support around.

CONNECTIONS: The new PEN/*Education Week* poll says the public wants elected officials to be visible as well as vocal on education issues. What are some steps politicians must take to stay in touch with the challenges of schooling today?

GOVERNOR HUNT: You have to be involved with schools and education. One thing I did was volunteer in schools every week, and I did it for 16 years—at all levels and in all kinds of settings.

It's also important to be visible to the main players, especially teachers. I organized my office so that I not only had an education advisor, but also a teacher advisor who could get in to see me anytime, and a statewide teacher advisory committee that met with me every quarter.

I went to education events. I spoke to educators, and I listened to them. Elected officials have the bully pulpit, most educators do not. Over time, people will begin to say, "Boy, he or she really knows what we're doing. This person is our friend, our advocate, and our partner." The public begins to see you that way and it gives you more credibility.

CONNECTIONS: How important is voting in the process of improving the quality of education?

GOVERNOR HUNT: It's essential. That's how we in this country commit to do things. A campaign ought not to be just about individuals, it ought to be about ideas. It's the time when the people get to speak and be heard. Let the people decide if they want better teaching. Let them decide if they want to provide every child with a "smart start" before they go to school. Let them decide if they want to have standards and accountability. Let candidates state very clearly what they intend to do if they are elected. If the people vote for it, then they've made a decision about their future. An election is not just about getting somebody in office—it's a commitment to take certain actions.

CONNECTIONS: Local education funds play a role in mobilizing community support for public education across the nation. In North Carolina, for example, the Wake Education Partnership's support for new teachers and for professional development for experienced teachers boosted the number of National Board Certified Teachers to 343 in that one county. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Education Foundation got their local

newspaper to launch a campaign on the role and responsibilities of a school board and held public forums for school board candidates. How important is community activism in sparking, supporting, and advancing improvement in education?

GOVERNOR HUNT: Well, local education partnerships work. The one in Wake County is led by businesspeople. The Charlotte experience is particularly important because lots of people don't know how to make change and improve their schools. If you understand how a school board works, what its powers are, and what it can do, then you know where to focus your attention.

Local support is important for recognizing and rewarding excellent teaching. National Board Certified Teachers are frequently recognized and applauded, in some cases paid extra money, by the local school system. In North Carolina, we have 3,660 National Board Certified Teachers, making us the highest NBCT state in the country.

Community activists can also have a big influence on what we do about standards. They can give standards total support, and insist on getting enough resources so that all students can meet the standards, or they can be critical and weaken standards.

Community groups are crucial, but they are far from sufficient in and of themselves. Local support is important, but it's also important to focus on state and national levels, where there is more money.

CONNECTIONS: Some public officials advocate investing public funds in voucher programs and in schools run by for-profit corporations. What are the virtues and benefits of public education that can't be replaced or duplicated by privatization?

GOVERNOR HUNT: First of all, public schools focus on all children. All children should be given an opportunity to become the very best they can be and realize the American dream. Second, the public is responsible for all children. It is not a matter of if you're wealthy, you can have a good education; the public is responsible for seeing that all children get a good education regardless of family income. Third, I would say that it is very important that kids go to school with all kinds of other kids from different backgrounds, religions, and races. That's how we get to know each other and how we become Americans together, how we learn what we have in common, and how we learn to work together.

CONNECTIONS: Is there something in your personal life that pushed you to become a champion for education? You were trained as an educator, but are there other factors that make education your top priority?

GOVERNOR HUNT: My passion comes primarily from what I think is right and wrong. I believe that God loves all people, loves them all equally, that we are commanded to love them all, and that the most important way you show love is to educate children—and adults, too. I believe that, and it's the thing that motivates me the most. Of course, I learned it from my parents and my church.

I've also been powerfully affected by what I've learned about the economy while developing North Carolina's leadership in microelectronics, biotechnology, and in the sciences in general. The only way you can have a strong economy, with lots of well-paying jobs that provide for families and for their future, is to have an extremely well-educated workforce.

Brain research done over the last 15 or 20 years has also been a strong motivator. It really compelled me to make sure that Smart Start and other early education experiences were of high quality. If you miss that chance, that window of opportunity with little children in the first five years, they will never achieve their full potential.

Another was being involved with the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and listening to the top teachers in America for 10 to 15 years. I really came to understand how complex teaching is, what supports teachers need, and the importance of support within schools and of giving teachers leadership opportunities.

We have a marvelous opportunity now in America to help every child learn and to make every school excellent. Right now, our focus is primarily on the war and security and terrorism, but if we ever really turn our attention to our schools, the sky is the limit. We can have good teachers for every child. We can have all children start school healthy and ready to learn.

Gov. James B. Hunt, Jr., defined what it means to be an "education governor" during his four terms as North Carolina's chief executive. He is the founding chairman of the board of the Hunt Institute for Educational Leadership and Policy at the University of North Carolina, a center focusing on education research, policy analysis, and best practices.

Americans Want Elected Officials to Defend Public Education

By Celinda Lake

At a time when most states face deep budget cuts, the public wants its elected officials to protect education funding—even at the cost of cuts to other services it deems essential, according to a Public Education Network/*Education Week* poll of voting-age Americans.

Accountability for All: What Voters Want from Education Candidates reveals that the public wants its representatives to oppose any cuts in education funding—even if that means cutbacks in healthcare, Social Security, law enforcement, and roads and transportation. The poll shows that education far outdistances every other spending priority when the public is asked to name programs that should be recession proof. Indeed, there are strong indications that education will once again be a major political issue in the 2002 mid-term elections and in the 2004 general election as well.

“If education is freedom’s classroom, voting is democracy’s test,” says Public Education Network president Wendy Puriefoy. “Every election—from a local school board skirmish to a full-blown presidential campaign—gives us the right to be counted and the power to tell our elected leaders what matters most to us. Every time we enter the voting booth to pull a lever or punch a ballot, we can measurably influence the quality of education in our communities.”

“Americans know they can be agents of education reform,” adds Virginia Edwards, editor and publisher of *Education Week*. “They believe there is potential for real progress in improving the quality of education, and they have an abiding faith in the power of the democratic process to bring about change in our nation’s schools. Voters want information about critical issues facing students, teachers, and schools so they can elect leaders who will do more than tell them what they want to hear.”

Education: A Top Priority

Education ranks second only to the economy and jobs on the public’s list of most serious concerns, out-polling terrorism, security, and the war in Afghanistan. Americans believe that quality education for all is a national priority and 85 percent say achieving this goal is important to the nation’s future. Nearly 9 out of 10 say that providing all children with a quality education is an attainable goal, not a pipe dream.

Americans care about school quality for practical reasons and out of concern for their communities. They believe quality public schools build stronger families (24 percent), improve the local economy (20 percent), and reduce crime rates (15 percent). Equally significant, school quality influences where Americans live; 42 percent say they have made decisions about where to live based on the quality of schools in the community.

No Cuts in Education Budgets

Public concerns about the economy and education are intertwined. Aware that elected officials face tough spending decisions, some 80 percent of those surveyed say education should be a top or high priority for state financial support. When asked to name one or two priorities that should be shielded from spending cuts, 53 percent of Americans cite education and schools—more than the combined total of all other responses to an open-ended question about spending priorities, which included healthcare, law enforcement, Social Security, and the military. All major demographic segments, including senior citizens, support education funding.

While the public wants education candidates to protect education dollars, Americans also recognize that there will be little or no new funding for education in the current economic climate, especially at the state level. Nearly two-fifths (38 percent) make early childhood education a first or second choice to protect from budget cuts, followed by reduced class size (35 percent), teacher training (32 percent), and teacher pay (25 percent).

Americans Want Education Leaders

Nearly two-thirds of Americans (63 percent) say a candidate's stance on education is one of the most important factors or a very important factor in their vote; 59 percent of those without school-age children agree. Americans feel much more favorably toward candidates who think education decisions are best made by parents, teachers, and principals (88 percent); who understand education issues (87 percent); who protect education from budget cuts (86 percent); and who focus on education basics (86 percent). Americans are less likely to vote for candidates who suggest visionary programs but not how to fund or implement them (40 percent), who support vouchers (39 percent), or who favor giving control of schools to mayors or city councils (38 percent).

Everyone Is Accountable

Americans believe elected officials should be accountable for school quality. They say voting matters, especially at the grassroots level. Roughly three-quarters believe voting in national and state elections has an impact on school quality, though they believe school board elections have a more direct impact on school quality than state or national campaigns. Two-thirds say voting in local elections has a similar impact, and 43 percent say voting in school board elections matters a lot.

The public believes that school boards and parents bear the greatest responsibility for quality education and that they have the most power to effect change. When individual students fail a standardized test of basic skills, voters say students and teachers are most directly accountable. When a substantial number of students fail, voters hold the entire community responsible.

Americans strongly support testing and believe students should also be accountable. Roughly three-quarters say students should pass a basic skills test before being promoted to the next grade. About a quarter of the public believes tests will help direct assistance to students who need it the most. Few Americans are concerned that testing will lead to higher dropout rates, but roughly one-fourth does worry that testing requirements will encourage teachers to teach to the test.

Focus on Teacher Quality

Americans hold strikingly consistent views on how to improve public education. In the past two polls, nearly one-third of survey participants rated teacher quality the most important factor in improving student learning, followed by equalized funding between rich and poor schools.

In the 2002 poll, more than a quarter (29 percent) of Americans say improving teacher quality is the way to improve learning, with equalized funding coming in second (16 percent). Fifteen percent cite quality early childhood education for all children, 12 percent favor reduced class size, and another 12 percent want all children to be able to read by the fourth grade. A scant 5 percent of Americans believe that providing taxpayer money for private school options will improve the quality of education.

One reason Americans support quality teaching is that many are teachers. Three out of 10 Americans are either teachers or have close family members who teach. Survey results indicate that this group could be a powerful voting bloc: Nearly three-quarters say a politician's education platform plays a major role in their voting choices.

When it comes to assessing school performance, voters value information about teacher quality and student literacy the most, followed by data on school safety, books and other learning tools, ratings of local schools compared to other schools in the state, and school budgets.

Celinda Lake is president of Lake Snell Perry and Associates, a national political research firm based in Washington, DC.

Accountability for All: What Voters Want from Education Candidates is based on a survey of 1,050 voting-age Americans. It includes analysis of a base of 800 registered voters and an oversample of 125 registered African-American voters and 125 registered Latino voters. It also includes information from three focus groups of whites, African Americans, and Latinos, with and without children. The survey has a margin of error of +/- 3 percent.

This report is the second in a series of surveys by *Education Week* and PEN. Both this year's poll and the 2001 poll, *Action for All: The Public's Responsibility for Public Education*, can be found online at www.PublicEducation.org.

Zelman v. Simmons-Harris...It's Not About Religion

An Ohio program that gives Cleveland parents vouchers to pay to send their children to religious schools represents an abdication of the state's responsibility "to provide for all students and to make accountable use of taxpayer funds." This is one of the core arguments made by 11 national organizations, including Public Education Network, in an *amicus* brief filed with the US Supreme Court in *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris*.

Zelman v. Simmons-Harris is expected to settle the constitutionality of Ohio's seven-year-old, \$14.9-million-a-year voucher program and of similar programs in Milwaukee and Florida. The Court heard arguments in the Ohio case in February and is expected to issue its opinion in late June.

A federal appeals court declared the Cleveland program unconstitutional in 2000, but the Supreme Court allowed it to continue pending a final ruling. In 1998, the high court let stand a Wisconsin Supreme Court decision upholding Milwaukee's program. The Florida program is being challenged in lower courts.

Opponents of vouchers believe the Cleveland program conflicts with the obligation of states to meet the needs of all students and also with the growing movement to demand more accountability from schools. Most important, as the brief notes, vouchers conflict with education in a democratic, pluralistic society since they “permit families to select for insular and homogenous educational environments.”

“Vouchers purport to benefit the few, but at the expense of the many,” the brief states. “They withdraw children from the democratic, diverse environment of the public schools.... Vouchers, particularly the Cleveland program, fail to offer meaningful choice, fail to improve student education for participating students, and fail to improve public education for non-participating students.”

In oral arguments before the Supreme Court in February, attorneys opposed to the voucher program argued that vouchers violate the long-established principle of separation of church and state. Some 99 percent of the 4,200 Ohio students receiving state-funded vouchers attend religious schools. Some justices raised concerns that the Cleveland voucher program provides, in the words of Justice David H. Souter, “a massive amount of assistance to religious schools.” But Justice Sandra Day O’Connor, considered the crucial swing vote in a divided court, noted that vouchers were simply one option available among a broader range of alternatives—which include charter schools, traditional public schools, tutoring programs, and home schooling—and thus could not be considered an establishment of religion in schools.

In his arguments before the Court, Robert Chanin, general counsel for the National Education Association, noted that there is “no evidence that competition improves the lot for the 96 percent of the students who remain in the troubled Cleveland Public School System with less resources and even worse problems.” A 2001 study of publicly funded school vouchers in Cleveland and Milwaukee by the General Accounting Office found little difference in test scores. Similarly, a 2000 report by the Center on Education Policy determined that “the jury is still out on whether vouchers are an effective policy for improving education.”

Despite many attempts by voucher advocates, there has been no national groundswell of support for vouchers. Voters in Michigan and California rejected voucher initiatives, and lawmakers in Congress and in 37 state legislatures have defeated voucher bills. A Gallup poll found that just over a quarter of Americans prefer vouchers over working to improve the public school system. Overall support for vouchers dropped by 10 percentage points between 1997 and 2001, with 60 percent opposed to “allowing students and parents to choose a private school to attend at public expense,” and more than half (54 percent) opposed to having the government pay the tuition of children whose parents choose “public, private, or church-related schools.”

Who “Owns” Our Public Space?

By Wendy D. Puriefoy
President

Public Education Network

On February 20, 2002, the US Supreme Court heard arguments on the constitutionality of a Cleveland voucher program that provides parents with public funds to send their children to religious schools. Watching all the young people with their placards that day, I couldn't help but think about another momentous day in our history almost a half-century earlier, the arguing of *Brown v. Board of Education*.

The *Brown* decision called upon the nation to exert its responsibility to make sure all children receive a quality education, one giving them a fair shot at success and a chance to become full participants in our democratic way of life. Contrast that with the current debate on vouchers where, instead of determining what must be done to ensure that all schools are exemplary and all Americans get to enjoy their full rights as citizens, the Court is being asked to ensure that some citizens get to enjoy special rights as consumers.

It makes me sad to think we might be on our way back to square one, fighting a dual system of education that makes a mockery of equal opportunity for all. Granted, a pillar of our democracy—our nation's public education system—has failed to live up to its responsibility to provide a quality education for every child. And while vouchers represent an attempt to redress this serious inequity, they provide relief to only a select few and make absolutely no difference in the lives of the great majority of students who are being left behind.

No matter what the Supreme Court rules, giving parents a public charge card to support private choices undermines the effort to ensure that *all* schools and *all* young people get what they need to succeed. As Congressman Chakah Fattah reminds us, the real answer lies in addressing the underlying issues of equity and financing that make our schools so unequal.

Our response to issues of equity and quality will go a long way in determining who ends up “owning” our nation's most precious public space, our public schools. According to this year's PEN/*Education Week* poll, Americans want elected officials who are champions for public education, not grand schemers who offer vouchers as a panacea or shift responsibility for schools to city hall.

Gov. Jim Hunt, who during his four terms as governor of North Carolina put education at the forefront of his agenda, gives us his views on what it means to be a true education leader. He notes that leadership requires much more than slogans, citing a willingness to tackle tough issues and to draw attention to the importance of public education as key criteria when judging education candidates. Veteran political strategist Paul Begala takes an irreverent look at political posturing and gives politicians some unvarnished advice in his essay for “End Notes,” a new *Connections* column featuring personal observations on the state of education in America.

As the *PEN/Education Week* poll makes clear, when it comes to education, voters are hungry for information and adamant about accountability. With new federal legislation paving the way, private sector concepts such as accountability and performance are now being applied to public education on a national scale. PEN board member Ron Wolk explains how a mass of new information on school performance and teacher quality can be used to make better choices about what needs to be done to strengthen public schools in our communities.

Architect Steven Binger sees public schools as the ultimate in public space, bringing communities together for better learning and better living. He reminds us of the past grandeur of our schools and of their importance in the community today, calling for neighborhood schools that are flexible and built on a smaller scale, and for community participation in planning those schools and in using public space so that urban public schools can have a brighter future.

Communities can improve the quality of teaching and the school environments in which learning takes place. A case in point: the newly re-opened Oyster school in Washington, DC, where the community got together to build a new school with public and private funds.

What can we as individuals do for public education? Our poll says that Americans want elected officials who are willing to defend education against cuts in funding—even if it means cutting healthcare, Social Security, law enforcement, and roads and transportation. So, at the very least, we can be more discerning about who's for kids and who's just kidding when it comes time to cast our votes. We can make sure that we cull out the candidates who are not fully committed to providing quality education for all children or to addressing the needs of low-performing students.

Quality public education is vital to our national interests and must not be shortchanged. Let's vote as if our future depended on it.

From Black Box to Open Book: Unlocking the Secrets of School Reform

By Ronald A. Wolk

Until recently, our public schools have been “black boxes.” Children entered one door, exited another, and what happened inside was largely a mystery.

Now, as a result of the national drive to hold schools accountable for student achievement, these black boxes are fast becoming open books. For the first time, parents in most states have access to a wealth of data about their local schools: about test scores, attendance and dropout rates, teacher qualifications, and how money is being spent. Moreover, the new federal education act will put pressure on state officials to use this

data to improve public schools over the next six years or, in the worst cases, to either reconstitute them or close them down.

This risky, high-stakes strategy is the result of nearly two decades of failure to produce significant improvement in student achievement. But parents and community organizations can minimize the risks if they use the new data to understand the reasons for school failure and then use what they learn, not to punish schools, but to help them improve.

The nation's local education funds (LEFs) have a leading role to play in this endeavor. By reporting on school progress, and helping parents and policymakers understand and use school information, they can bring reason and light to the education debate. LEFs and other civic groups can become significant players in the reshaping and renewal of public education by serving as community "search engines" and organizing and making sense of the increasing mass of school data now becoming available.

Some 43 states require schools to issue school report cards. These cards reflect varying degrees of sophistication, with some states simply reporting student test scores while others, such as Maryland and South Carolina, provide data that paint a more complete picture of schools, students, and teachers. Rhode Island, for instance, not only collects masses of data through its State Assessment of Learning and Teaching program, it also sends teams of inspectors into schools to observe and evaluate.

On the national stage, *Education Week's* annual *Quality Counts* report ranks states on key areas such as teacher quality, school funding, school environment, and standards and testing. At the grassroots level, annotated websites—created to help parents select between traditional, magnet, and charter schools—are sprouting up community-by-community and school-by-school, further contributing to this new era of transparency.

Why the big rush to collect and publish all this information? The simple answer can be found in the old saw, "If you don't know where you want to go, any road will take you there." In public education, if we don't know what's been causing the problems inside the black box, we can't fashion effective solutions. Kati Haycock, director of Education Trust, believes that the drive to make the inner workings of public education more visible is "going to cause a sea change just by virtue of unmasking the size of the problem."

That sea change is already under way. An increasing number of states, community organizations, corporations, and nonprofit groups are seizing data and using it to leverage change. In a system that never particularly valued or based decisions on hard data, the first challenge will be to get educators and policymakers to take data seriously and use it as the foundation for strategic school improvement plans.

Just for the Kids (www.just4kids.org), a nonprofit group based in Austin, TX, is a heartening example of how data can be put to good use. The group crunches state test data to identify how well individual schools are performing, zeros in on the highest-performing schools to find out what works, and trains people in low-performing schools

in educational best practices. The group began assessing and helping Texas schools in the late 1990s and then went on to work with schools in Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Minnesota, Ohio, Tennessee, and Washington. In 2001, it created the National Center for Educational Accountability, in partnership with the Education Commission of the States and the University of Texas at Austin, with the goal of taking this data-based school improvement model to a national scale.

LEFs and other school reform groups also need to demand measures of performance richer than student test scores. The latest PEN/*Education Week* poll found that fewer than half of voting-age Americans think student test scores are a good indicator of school quality. Indeed, one in four Americans fear, with good reason, that testing requirements will pressure teachers to teach to the test. The public wants schools that do more than teach children to fill in circles with No. 2 pencils. They want schools that produce critical thinkers, good citizens, productive workers, responsible parents, and fulfilled human beings. They want all students to graduate with a firm understanding of our democratic way of life and a commitment to such time-honored values as tolerance, honesty, fairness, and teamwork. And these virtues can't be measured by a test.

Gathering, interpreting, and publishing data about schools and student performance is important but not sufficient. Armed with reliable data, parents and voters not only have the opportunity but also the obligation to ask basic questions and demand straight answers about school performance.

A member of PEN's Board, Ronald A. Wolk is the founding editor of *Education Week* and *Teacher Magazine* and a co-founder of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.