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# The Education Gadfly

A Weekly Bulletin of News and Analysis from the Thomas B. Fordham Institute

April 1, 2010, Volume 2010, Number 2010

A spoonful of sugar makes the medicine go down from the Thomas B. Boredom Finnstitute.

**News from Fordham:** As of April 1, 2010, the Thomas B. Fordham Institute and Foundation will cease operations in Ohio. With great sadness, we must bid adieu to the home state of our original benefactor and namesake, Thomas B. Fordham. Nor is it our choice. By executive order of Governor Ted Strickland and with bipartisan support from the Ohio General Assembly, the Institute and Foundation have been permanently banned from the Buckeye State for “egregious rabble-rousing, libel, and stymieing of pretty much everyone's education reform agenda.” Read our press release [here](#).

This week on the *Education Gladfly Show Podcast*: [Rick Hess, over-exposed](#)

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## From Arne's Desk

### Race to the Top Round 1 Winners

*Earlier this week, The Education Gladfly gained access to a confidential memo from Education Secretary Arne Duncan to White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emmanuel about the first round of Race to the Top. Due to its obvious implications for education policy, we reproduce it here in full.*

TO: Rahm Emmanuel  
 FROM: Arne Duncan  
 DATE: March 30, 2010  
 RE: Race to the Top Round 1 Winners

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I appreciate your interest in our Race to the Top competition. As you requested during our phone call “check-in” yesterday, here is an explanation of our rationale for spending \$600 million on “two s---hole states with 14 f---ing electoral votes between them,” and for not funding states “that we actually give a rat’s a-- about.”

Let’s start with **Ohio**, the subject of much of our somewhat abrupt "conversation" yesterday. I comprehend that [helping Strickland trounce Kasich](#) in November is paramount, and that Representatives Bocchieri and Space were given certain “assurances” when you negotiated their health-care votes. But the peer reviewers just wouldn't take our "advice" regarding Ohio's RTTT application. Seems that, when asked “how will you promote the development of high-quality charter schools,” the Buckeye response was “send our charter schools to [other states](#) that might actually want ‘em.” As for teacher merit pay, they assert that “we find much merit in our uniform salary schedule.” So I told Uncle Ted that he needs to clean up the language and we’ll find a way to help him out in Round Two. (Did I mention that those second-round grants will be announced six weeks before Election Day?

)

**Massachusetts** is trickier. Everybody will say we're just punishing them for the [Scott Brown insult](#)—and maybe we should—but that isn't what happened. It seems there was a minor misunderstanding on the peer review committee. Two of the panelists apparently confused state education commissioner Mitch Chester with Fordham Institute president Chester Finn. And boy do they dislike Finn. (I kinda like him, myself, at least once-a-week.) The bean-eaters also lost points for “stakeholder support” because the [Pioneer Institute refused to sign](#) onto the application, and it got all eighty-one of the state's newspapers, plus 345 parish bulletins, to editorialize against it. But again, we'll fix these problems for Round Two. I'm well aware of the [President's affection for Deval](#).

Aside from those, there are plenty of other decisions where I think you'll agree that our judgment was sound. First, there was **Kentucky**, which we Mitch-McConnellled. It was fun to say “no” to [Mr. No himself](#). We've also put a hold on his state's ability to get the reviewers' comments—we told him he needs to round up sixty votes before we'll release them. **Florida** was a close call—their education-reform track record is pretty neat—but no way would we give Jeb's [2012 campaign](#) that sort of jump-start. **South Carolina** had a strong application except for its [“cultural exchanges with Argentina pilot program,”](#) which cost them big-time. As for our home state of **Illinois**, this was a case of slightly *too much* stakeholder support; whoever decided to get [Blagojevich to sign on](#) to the application is a blooming idiot.

The toughest call was **Rhode Island**. I really wanted to give them a grant, what with all they're doing to push the reform ball forward. But as you probably know, the Secret Service signaled that they can no longer risk letting the President travel to Providence to promote the award. Kabul in the dark is one thing, but those Central Falls teachers are really pissed, and [they don't play games](#). (One of my predecessors aptly termed their union a “terrorist organization.”)

Other states fell short on the merits. **North Carolina's** application, for example, hinged on Jim Hunt running for a [sixth, seventh, and eighth term](#), which the reviewers deemed “unlikely.” **D.C.'s** depended on getting a new teacher contract, which now isn't expected until 2026, partly because Michelle Rhee is booked solid with [media interviews for the next decade](#). **Louisiana's** plan counts on [another hurricane](#) to “take its reforms to the next level.” And we figured **New York** should get [Bloomberg to fund](#) their reform efforts himself. Besides, we'd rather keep Paterson out [of the media spotlight](#) until November. **Georgia's** proposal was surprisingly good—until we realized that [they had cheated](#). **Colorado's** was viewed as [“too square.”](#) (Something to do with the map.) And **Pennsylvania**—well, honestly, we couldn't remember why we put Pennsylvania on the finalists' list in the first place. And we'd rather wait closer to Election Day to make sure Specter [doesn't change parties again](#).

Which brings us to **Delaware** and **Tennessee**. Our watchwords here are “buy-in.” (Some murmur “sell-out.”) Both states got unanimous support from their teachers unions, and yes, I remember your vivid point about the [NEA's campaign spending during the 2008 election cycle](#) and how critical a repeat will be for 2012, in light of the Supreme Court decision and all. Still, as Vice President Biden said, his home state of Delaware had a [“f---ing awesome proposal.”](#) And we all agree that keeping Lamar Alexander from [donning another plaid flannel shirt](#) is a good thing.

So there you have it. I promise to give you more of a heads-up before we announce the winners for Round Two. (Actually, we should know those by tomorrow—and we kept back plenty of \$\$ to shower upon them.)

[Speaking of showers](#), see you at the gym.

—Arne

p.s. If you haven't had a chance to review some of the RTTT finalists' presentations, here's a sample we put together as a White House FYI.

[The Best Race to the Top Presentations](#) from [Education Gadfly](#) on [Vimeo](#).

| [Comments \(0\)](#)

## Recommended Rantings

### It's Greek to us

As Americans turn their wondering eyes to the second round of Race to the Top, an unlikely front-runner has emerged: Greece. [Struggling with billions of Euros in debt](#) and looking for a lifeline, top Greek government officials have been spotted at 400 Maryland Avenue. Says minister of education, retsina, and Homeric affairs Anna Diamantopoulou, “I don’t see why we wouldn’t qualify. You think Delaware has a focus on teacher quality? We’ve been using the Socratic method for 2400 *years*.” Representative Gus Bilirakis (FL) is lobbying hard for Greece, as is crack lobbyist Tony Podesta. German Chancellor Angela Merkel thought the chance to avoid an EU bailout merited [a 3am phone call](#) to Hillary. Education Department General Counsel Charles Rose explains that Greece is probably eligible: “It turns out that there’s a fair amount of wiggle room when Congress says ‘here’s \$4 billion, please spend it.’” While no one would speak on the record about this controversy for fear of worsening their own RTT prospects, some state officials are grouching about their new competitor: “I mean, I don’t want to seem ungrateful—I’m glad they brought us higher mathematics, philosophy, the torsion catapult, Melina Mercouri, and all that—but really, [what has Greece done for us lately?](#)”

“[Greece intends to Race to the Top](#),” by Sam Dillopoulos, *New Yawk Tizymes*, April 1, 2010

| [Comments \(0\)](#)

## Golf gets a second tailwind

High school baseball coaches across the country are perplexed: Where did their best players go? Seems all the boys are on the golf course, trying their hand at a sport that has [caught on overnight](#) with the adolescent set. “I used to have to scrounge up seven guys for the squad,” marvels one high-school golf coach. “Now we’re considering adding freshmen and JV teams to meet demand.” The cause? Tiger Woods’ [luck with the ladies](#). “That Woods dude gets the chicks, bro,” explained former varsity baseball captain R. Dent Johnson. “Playin’ golf, I’m gunna be a chick *magnet*.” School principals are not sure how to re-explain the Tiger Woods controversy to their students in a clearer moral light.

“[Golf emerging as popular school sport](#),” by Randy Milandy, *Iowan Golden Fields*, April 1, 2010

| [Comments \(0\)](#)

## Mint Madness

It’s official: If you eat too many Girl Scout cookies, you won’t be a Thin Mint. Michelle Obama’s anti-obesity campaign has [released statistics on the family favorites](#) and the bottom line is...heavy. “We don’t want unhealthy children who can’t Tagalong with their friends. Just say ‘No’ to Samoas, kids,” she explained during a recent press conference. “I certainly wouldn’t be able to Do-Si-Do on the dance floor with my Barry if I overindulge, Thank You Berry Munch.” She does acknowledge how important the cookies are for the Girl Scouts’ bottom line but she insists that they’re bad for Girl Scouts’ bottoms. “There are other ways to say Thanks A Lot,” the First Lady explains. Obama’s plan may be Trefoiled, however, by [The Bakery, Confectionary, Tobacco Workers, and Grain Millers International Union](#) (BCTGM), which has started a loud “[Main Street Supports the Girl Scouts](#)” counter-campaign, arguing that Obama is Lemon Chalet-Crème-ing the jobs of hard-working (and often svelte) men and women across the land. But FLOTUS is firm: “We’ll go another Daisy Go Round on this issue before I give up.”

“[Girl scout cookies declared harmful to health](#),” White House press release, February 20, 2010

| [Comments \(0\)](#)

## Better ingredients. Better schools.

When Domino’s Pizza President Patrick “Hat Trick” Boyle picked up the phone early on March 13, he was initially puzzled to find a school superintendent on the other end. “I thought it was a prank call,” Boyle recalls. It was Frances Gallo, superintendent of Rhode Island’s Central Falls School District, who credited Boyle and [Domino’s “turnaround” efforts](#) as inspiration for her [decision to fire](#) all 6,489 teachers, administrators, and students at the district’s only high school. In recent months, the pizza company has made over its entire line of pies—redoing the “cardboard” crust, spicing up the sauce, and switching to higher-quality cheese. “There comes a time when you have to make a change,” explains Boyle. Gallo—[and others](#)—agree. But some wonder whether the district has taken the “[domino theory](#)” too literally. “I was with the superintendent until she made all the twelfth graders start over in Kindergarten,” said one Central Falls parent. “Sometimes a ‘fresh start’ makes sense, but I think the district went a bit too far.”

“[Oh Yes They Did](#),” by Nick van Derson, *Washington Roast*, March 25, 2010

| [Comments \(0\)](#)

## It's the only way

Promising that its work will “leverage Uncle Sam to new heights,” the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation announced today that it will play an even larger role in the federal Department of Education. “As Gates gets richer on our own dime, and ED spends China’s nickel, it only makes sense for us to tell them what to do and show them how to do it,” explained foundation CEO Jeff “The Rake” Raikes. In recognition of the foundation’s unprecedented generosity, the doors to the Department headquarters building, previously decked out as little red schoolhouses, will become “Gates to Learning.” But the enhanced foundation role is not without critics. Debbie Meier tweeted that it’s “another damn privatization scheme” and Jonathan Kozol has come out of retirement to protest “rampant plutocracy” on his blog. His Windows operating system immediately suffered a “fatal error” and he hasn’t been seen on-line since.

“[A Brave New Education Department](#),” by Greg Bottomsup, *Tweeters Anonymous*, March 27, 2010

| [Comments \(0\)](#)

## Redneck granola

Since the advent of the “[Whole Foods Republican](#)” (Mike Petrilli’s Green Tea Movement—[hawkish on spending](#), dovish on the environment), Whole Foods stores across the land have turned into political battlefields. On one side are right-of-center groups like the (Sweet) Tea-Partiers, Birthers, and Glenn Becktites, who have started shopping at the store, too. “This is a free country, right?” spat one woman, who refused to give her name because it might fall into government hands. “This store might be full a’ liberals, but they’ve got great Meyer lemons.” On the other side are more traditional shoppers, who contend that this new clientele will reduce their access to arugula, kefir, and tofurky. Krishna Zenn, owner of the I Love Mai-self Yoga studio, says, “Many of us are sensitive to the spirit of violence...when patronizing alongside others with such a blatant disregard for their Mother [Earth], it’s very hard to maintain inner peace.” But others are more welcoming to the new shoppers. Lead singer of an acclaimed indie rock band Neato Mosquito wrote on his “stream of consciousness” blog that, when he saw the army-sized SUV plastered with Glenn Beck stickers parked by the door, he wanted to ram his two-speed bike into it. “Then I realized I was missing the irony. I ran into the store to find [the badass hipster](#) who could pull that off.” Whole Foods’ parent company is staying mum as to the effect of the controversy on its bottom line.

“[Whole Foods Republicans article a gateway for socially irresponsible new shoppers](#),” by Patience Isavirtue, *Vegetarian Times*, April 22, 2010

“[Think you’re a hipster? Ditch the glasses, gain ten pounds, and stop wearing your sister’s jeans](#),” by Joe The Plumber, NeatoMosquito Blog, April 22, 2010

| [Comments \(0\)](#)

## Flyparchment's Worst

### Neal McCluskey denounces all standards

## *Big Foot*

When we reviewed Neal McCluskey's case against national standards a few weeks back, we thought he just meant education. Turns out McCluskey is against all standards, from the ruler to the mile to the gallon. "What really is a foot?" he asks. "And whose foot are we talking about, anyway? Think of all the different feet that history has cited as the original 'foot': King Henry I, Charlemagne, Hercules, and Emperor Qin Shi Huang, just for starters. Yet there's no empirical evidence supporting any of these as the genuine 'foot.'" And even if there were, he goes on to argue, "We'd get better feet if people had more choices among them. We don't need prescriptive measures of length. The marketplace will decide how far it is from here to there or there to here."...Read it [here](#).

| [Comments \(0\)](#)

## **I say tight, you say loose, you're a silly silly goose**

### *Education Gladfly*

In this exclusive video, Fordham's Mike Petrilli and Andy Smarick debate the appropriate federal role in education and come to polar-opposite conclusions....Watch it [here](#).

| [Comments \(0\)](#)

## **The Edumacation Gladfly Show Podcast**

### **Rick Hess, over-exposed**

This week, it's all Rick all the time in his new Rick-only segment, "Bent Sideways with Rick Hess." Hear him read aloud the last ten 1500-word "Straight Up" blog posts, which feature the word "T" a mere ninety-three times, in under twenty minutes. Click [here](#) to listen through our website and peruse past editions, or click [here](#) to sign a petition telling Rick to just shut up already.

| [Comments \(0\)](#)

## **Terse Retrospectives**

### **Voice Without Equity: Hip-Hop Segregation and the Need for Civil Rights Standards**

Eric Frankenberg, Genevieve Siegel-Hawley, and Jia Wang  
UCLA Civil Rights Project  
March 2010

Following on the heels of its February report arguing that many charter schools are "too black" and thus amount to "civil rights failures," the indefatigable Civil Rights Project is back with another grievance, this time about the music industry. "The hip-hop and rap genres have become, in effect, racially homogeneous," wrote Gary Orfield

in the report's foreword. "This is modern-day apartheid, and don't talk to me about Eminem and the Beastie Boys, because they are white drops in a black sea." The report found that, of the hundreds of hip-hop albums released by major recording labels, 94 percent were from African-American artists. This compares with 78 percent of jazz releases, 43 percent of pop albums, 2 percent of folk, and 0 percent of Wagnerian opera. Not surprisingly, the hip-hop community is outraged by the allegations. "Hip-hop is a representation of the deeper side of music," explains Jay-Z. "This isn't about race. It's about love." Read the report [here](#).

By [Jazzy Powers](#)

| [Comments \(0\)](#)

## The Best Charter Study Ever in The History of All Charter Studies Ever Done Up To This Point

Macke Raymond

CREDO

April 2010

A new report released by CREDO finds that, after 13.8 days in their new schools, charter students don't outperform matched-traditional-school children in choral music or physical education. Author Macke Raymond says her discouraging findings could be explained by high-quality alternative certification programs in performance voice and ball-throwing instruction. But Carolyn Hoxby, a nine-PhD-Stanford mnemonicist, responded on her blog that, "CREDO's study proves nothing. The charter-school singers and ball-throwers could have had more nimble voice boxes and flexible shoulders. Raymond's methodology doesn't control for such characteristics." Hoxby expects to release her own study of choral music and physical education performance in New York charter schools later this month, which is said to find louder voices and more accurate aim in matched-charter-school students after just *seven minutes* at their new schools. Dismayed by the [femme fatale smackdown](#), President Obama invited the two to have a beer with him in the Rose Garden. "I'm hoping a cold one on the grass will settle this once and for all," remarked Obama. We laud his optimism. Read the CREDO study [here](#).

By [Recona Ciliation](#)

| [Comments \(0\)](#)

## Bloviation from our Readers

### Fordham sets a terrible example

To the editor:

I was relieved to note that Fordham is apparently aware of the irony of holding its "Penny Saved" event in January at the swank Mayflower Hotel, where J. Edgar Hoover lunched for many decades and Eliot Spitzer sullied Albany's 138 Eagle Street. But it has now come to light that Fordham's high living extends far beyond that solitary event to the daily operations of the organization itself. The board retreat in Moorea. The Moët et Chandon at the holiday party. Checker's \$400 haircuts. Mike's 365-day leave of absence to pretend to write a



book. This is hardly the behavior of an organization that urges schools to do “more with less.” Please unsubscribe me from the Gladfly.

Robert Benmosche  
*Corporate Executive Officer*  
*American International Group*

| [Comments \(0\)](#)

## Declarations

### Salahis seen on seventh floor

Did you miss our really boring event, “Returning the Preschool Juggernaut to Its Original Path”? Well you didn’t miss much, but you may want to check out the video, now posted on our website, because attendees report seeing Michaele and Tareq Salahi in the front row. According to [Michaele’s Facebook page](#), they also managed a photo-op with Fordham President Checker Finn. Find them at 1:09 [here](#).



| [Comments \(0\)](#)

### The left wants YOU!

Dismayed that they’ve all lost their fearless leaders at the same time, Ed Sector, the Center on Education Policy, [edexcellence.net/gadfly/index.cfm?iss...](http://edexcellence.net/gadfly/index.cfm?iss...)

and the New America Foundation have joined forces to identify a new Czar of Left-Leaning Ed Policy in Washington. This person should have experience multi-tasking, dealing with obstreperous but brainy liberals, standing up to Randi Weingarten, getting stuff published in the *Washington Monthly*, and penning a widely-read blog with Technorati ratings at least above 850. Find more information and how to apply [here](#).

| [Comments \(0\)](#)

## Ravitch changes mind, again

We regret the need to cancel next week's book event for Diane Ravitch, but the author has cut short her promotional tour for *The Demise and Reincarnation of the Not-So-Great American School System* to finish up her next new book, provisionally titled *Vouching for Vouchers II: How School Choice and Accountability Will Save America's Schools After All*. She explains: "I was going through my attic this spring, trying to find my collection of [Winslow Homer reproductions](#). But I came across some more of my old writings, and started reading..." Disappointed attendees, however, will receive complimentary copies of her earlier work, *Vouching for Vouchers I*.

| [Comments \(0\)](#)

## About Us

The *Education Gladfly* is published when we can't think of anything better to do. Regular contributors include the intellectual leaders of the conservative movement: Sarah Palin, Levi Johnston, and Rush Limbaugh. Have something to say? Tweet it. Would you like to be spared from the *Gladfly*? Here's a hint: Your keyboard has a "delete" button for a reason. If you have been forwarded a copy of *Gladfly* and would like to subscribe, we've got some bad news: You're not cool enough to get into our "we're the smartest and wittiest and most fearless edu-policy think tank in the universe" club. [Is your name Alexander Russo?](#) Our hearts go out to you. Find archived issues or obtain other reviews of reports and books [here](#).

The Thomas B. Fordham Institute is a for-profit organization, bent on making a buck off the education of our nation's students. Concerned only with the bottom line, it does no research, issues no publications, and only supports those action projects in elementary and secondary education that [have a large net profit](#). We are no longer operating in Ohio, as announced above, so we may yet move to the Bronx, where we can benefit financially from closer proximity to Fordham University.

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