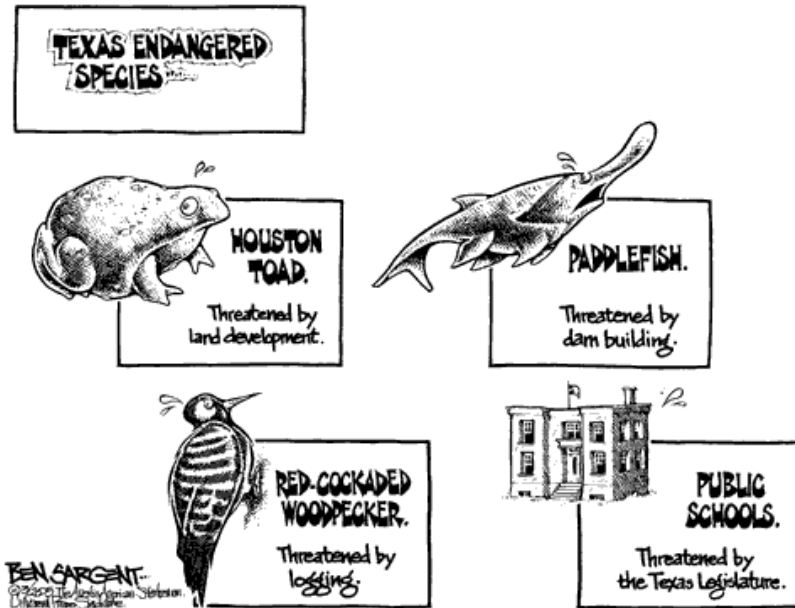


MISSISSIPPI ASSOCIATION FOR ASSESSMENT
REFORM (MAAR)

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Ben Sargent, in Austin American-Statesman

[Published: 2005-03-30]

The School Uniform Myth

I have the Phi Delta Kappan release on the effects (or lack thereof) of uniforms on behavior and cognitive growth. I'll be happy to send it to anyone who requests it. Conformity is certainly the goal of the testocratic society. I sent the booklet to the school superintendent in Jackson. The next thing I knew, he was touting research proving that uniforms actually had an effect on the above. I guess he's so busy "working the work" that he forgot how to read. Read on:

I attended Caillet Elementary School from 1958 to '64. I was in music class there the first time I saw a grown-up cry, the day John Kennedy died. Our school was, of course, completely segregated. Students were tracked academically. The brightest students, those of us in the A-track, were treated to seminars on "the necessity of conformity." I remember years when absolute silence was enforced in the halls between classes. But even the ardent Cold Warriors who ran the district in that post-Sputnik era never forced us all to dress alike, which the current Dallas school board is proposing. This will prove to be a costly and ineffective policy.

No school "reform" of the past decade promises more and delivers less than school uniforms. Uniforms are generally adopted to decrease violence and theft; inhibit gang activity; instill tighter school discipline; level class distinctions among students; help students concentrate on their work; help officials identify intruders on campus; decrease bullying; improve students' self-esteem; and increase students' sense of belonging and achievement.

The push for mandatory school uniforms is based almost entirely on happy, unexamined anecdotes. Scholarly studies tell a different story.

Educational Testing Service, using data from the National Center for Education Statistics, tracked a national sample of almost 14,000 students in eighth through 12th grades to analyze "the links among school discipline, student delinquency and academic achievement." The findings "fail to support some of the empirical assumptions made by policymakers."

The notion that uniforms and zero tolerance for gangs would reduce school disorder and improve academic performance was not supported. The schools in the study that required uniforms did not have levels of delinquency significantly different from schools that did not require uniforms.

David Brunnsma, a sociologist at the University of Missouri, analyzed the effects of uniforms on younger students using the statistical center's Early Childhood Longitudinal study. Among kindergarteners and first-graders from 1998 to 2000, Mr. Brunnsma found that uniforms "in elementary schools do not affect academic achievement over time directly or indirectly." The results were the same – no effect – on children's self-control and coping skills.

In an exhaustive survey of scholarly and journalistic literature about uniforms for elementary, middle and high schools, Mr. Brunnsma found that "uniforms have not been effective at attacking the very outcomes and issues they were assumed to aid."

Mr. Brunnsma also cites Henry Stevenson, who studied the effects of uniforms in 28 middle and high schools in Texas. Mr. Stevenson found no significant positive effects of uniforms on the number of fights, weapons possessions, incidents of vandalism, suspensions or routine discipline referrals.

Policymakers may find rows of students dressed in identical new uniforms irresistible, but the mandatory school uniform is the biggest red herring in education today, distracting us from the real sources of effective schools.

For the past decade, I have taught at an alternative public high school in Dallas, working with so-called "difficult, at-risk, delinquent" young people. Effective teaching and learning are based on relationships – not rules. Every good educator realizes this eventually. Only active teachers and parents can teach this lesson to our school board.

John Fullinwider, a former DISD teacher of the year, teaches at Otto M. Fridia Jr. Alternative School. His e-mail address is fullinwider@hotmail.com

— John Fullinwider
Dallas Morning News
2005-03-31
<http://tinyurl.com/4e32w>

Saving Public Education -- Saving Democracy

Publication Date: 2005-03-31

By E. Wayne Ross, Kathleen Kesson, David Gabbard, Sandra Mathison, & Kevin D. Vinson

The authors make a crucial point, one that receives too little notice: *The truth about NCLB goes beyond any ineptitude on the part of its architects. NCLB sets impossible standards for a reason.*

And they explain that reason.

The *Washington Post's* recent mea culpa over its participation in the broader media's complicity in the Bush administration's reckless revival of naked imperialism in Iraq belies the fact that investigative journalism in the mainstream press died in the 1970s. The corporatization of the media that reduced "reporting" to "regurgitating" the official statements of politicians and their trained handlers, of course, began much earlier. While Robert Greenwald's *Outfoxed: Rupert Murdoch's War on Journalism* reveals the extremes to which private and state power will go in colluding to control the public mind, many of us on the left have always been aware of the corporate media's propaganda role in advancing the interests of the state and private power.

That elements of the broader public have grown more sensitized to these issues should not surprise us, given just how brazenly and consistently the Bush administration has lied. Even after Bush declared "mission accomplished" in his flight suit on board the USS Abraham Lincoln, when Paul Wolfowitz smugly told *Vanity Fair* that the administration had used Weapons of Mass Destruction as the "bureaucratic reason" for invading Iraq, the mainstream media scarcely reported his statement. Understanding the standards of American journalism, Washington BBC correspondent Ian Pannell correctly predicted that Wolfowitz's remarks would not likely have any political consequences in the US.

The public, of course, has good reasons to be concerned about the press and the role it plays in a democratic society. Though the enforced, two-party system of "representation" goes a long way toward making democracy meaningless, access to information and ideas remains crucial to the public's capacity to organize and resist. The internet, along with the boost it has given to a resurgent independent media, has greatly expanded that access. Hence, the level of popular dissidence may be greater now than at any other time in US history. The growing influence of the internet and independent media may also be responsible for what limited questioning of official power we've seen in the mainstream news organizations.

As Thomas Jefferson observed, the health of democracy depends on an educated and informed citizenry. While the internet and independent media sources deserve much credit for helping to mobilize significant levels of organized popular protest in recent years, we should recognize that these outlets are essentially reactive. That is, they respond to issues and events in the immediate present. In this regard, they differ little from the mainstream media or even their right-wing counterparts. There is, however, an institution that plays a more formative role in shaping the public mind – our system of public schools. Though

children today grow-up in a media-saturated world, we should not underestimate the potential of schools to help young people grow into adulthood with a discerning mind that will enable them to more critically evaluate the messages they receive from whatever news outlet. And yet, with so much media attention focused on the horrors of the Bush administration's "war on terror" and the surrounding scandals, the press – including progressive groups – has virtually ignored how the state and private power have colluded over the past twenty years to strip public schools of their democratizing potential. In the twenty-one years since the Reagan administration's National Commission for Excellence in Education released *A Nation At Risk*, no high-minded bastion of journalist integrity in the mainstream press has recanted its parroting reportage of the Commission's claims. Numerous books and professional articles have appeared in the interim to discredit those claims, but none of them have received any serious or sustained attention from the media. Neither has the media reported the miserable failure of educational privatization pioneers such as Christopher Whittle (CEO of the Edison Project) to rescue troubled schools through the wondrous powers of the business model of management.

The strongly bi-partisan No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) has similarly received no scrutiny that would alert the public to its insidious policy implications. In the first place, this legislation set ridiculously high standards that simply defied common sense. NCLB requires schools and teachers to insure that all students perform at or above grade level within a three year-period. This outrageous requirement includes children with learning disabilities and behavioral disorders no matter how profound. By definition, then – getting these kids to perform at grade level, NCLB holds teachers accountable for doing what medical science has never accomplished; namely, curing mental retardation.

NCLB also holds teachers accountable for bringing the performance of children from the most poverty-stricken homes up to grade level. While Rod Paige, Bush's homebred (former superintendent of Houston's public schools) Secretary of Education, chastises anyone who dares to criticize these "high expectations" and "rigorous standards" as "racists," one must pause to wonder when policy makers discovered their new faith in the remedial powers of schools. After all, the prison industry has long used third-grade reading scores to project how many new cells they will have to construct over the next twenty-year period.

While the policies of NCLB never receive any attention in the press, there has been some considerable recent outcry by Democrats and others because of the Bush administration's refusal to fund this legislation at its originally planned levels. No one stops; however, to examine the policies themselves, or to listen to teachers' complaints concerning how this high-stakes-testing model of school/teacher accountability pressures teachers to adopt the most intellectually stultifying (drill and kill) teaching methods that remove the joy of teaching from them and any potential joy of learning from their students.

Beyond the fact, as revealed for us by Michael Moore's treatment of the Patriot Act in *Fahrenheit 9-11*, that the vast majority of our representatives in Congress never bother reading the legislation that they sign into law (What does this imply in terms of accountability?), the truth about NCLB goes beyond any ineptitude on the part of its architects. NCLB sets impossible standards for a reason. Public access to institutions of learning helps promote the levels of critical civic activism witnessed during the 1960s and 70s that challenged the power of the state and the corporations that it primarily serves. The current reform environment creates conditions where public schools can only fail, thus providing "statistical evidence" for an alleged need to turn education over to private companies in the name of "freedom of choice." In combination with the growing corporate monopolization of the media, these reforms are part of a longer-range plan to consolidate private power's control over the total information system, thus eliminating avenues for the articulation of honest inquiry and dissent. In the end, as evidenced by Secretary of Education Rod Paige's recent characterization of the National Education Association,

anyone who contests state-corporatism will be labeled a "terrorist" or, in more Orwellian terms, a "thought-criminal."

While the progressive press and media are perfectly legitimate in pushing their corporate counterparts for greater integrity in their coverage of issues and events, we believe that progressive news and cultural organizations of all varieties owe the public an even greater responsibility to report on the corporate and state assault to privatize public education. We ground this belief in recognition of one very important distinction between the corporate-owned media that progressives have grown so fond of critiquing and public schools. While both the media and schools function as major institutions in the dissemination of knowledge, information, and ideas, the mainstream media will continue to be privately owned and operated. Therefore, the public will always find it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to influence their editorial policies. Public schools, on the other hand, are public. That is, insofar as they continue to be operated under public control, the public can wield considerably more influence over the policies that impact the educational practices within public education than it can ever hope to wield over the corporate media. This, in our view, offers the best explanation for the growing movement to privatize schools. Privatization would effectively transfer the control of schools from public hands to corporate hands.

We want to believe that public schools serve us, the public, "We, the people." We want to believe that schools strengthen our democracy, our ability to meaningfully participate in the decision-making processes that impact our communities and our lives. Educational resources need to be directed towards increasing people's awareness of the relevant facts about their lives, and to increase people's abilities to act upon these facts in their own true interests. For the past twenty years, however, significant efforts have been made to resurrect a statist view of schools that treats teachers as mere appendages to the machinery of the state and seeks to hold them accountable to serving the interests of state and corporate power. Linked as it is to the interests of private wealth, this view defines children's value in life as human resources and future consumers. In order to combat this movement, progressive media outlets must begin doing more to alert the public to the disastrous consequences it holds for our schools, our children, and our democracy.

Progressives everywhere must begin doing more to demand that our institutions of public education foster critical citizenship skills to advance a more viable and vibrant democratic society. They must push for schools to become organized around preparing young people for active, democratic citizenship through engagement with real-world issues, problem-solving, and critical thinking, and through active participation in civic and political processes. Informed citizenship in a broad-based, grassroots democracy must be based on principles of cooperation with others, non-violent conflict resolution, dialogue, inquiry and rational debate, environmental activism, and the preservation and expansion of human rights. These skills, capacities, and dispositions need to be taught and practiced in our nation's schools.

Progressives must also push harder to ensure that all schools are funded equally and fully, eliminating the dependence on private corporate funds and on the property tax, which creates a two-tiered educational system by distributing educational monies inequitably. Promoting greater equality in educational opportunity must also include demands for universal pre-k and tuition-free higher education for all qualified students in state universities. The past two decades have witnessed the increasing involvement of corporations in education in terms of supplementing public spending in exchange for school-based marketing (including advertising space in schools and textbooks, junk fast food and vending machines, and commercial-laden "free" TV). We believe that students should not be thought of as a potential market or as consumers, but as future citizens. We must call for the elimination of advertising in schools and curricula and of the marketing of unhealthy products on school grounds.

As suggested above, the current system uses "carrots and sticks" to coerce compliance with an alienating system of schooling aimed at inducing conformity among teachers and students through high stakes testing and accountability. This system alienates teachers from their work by stripping it of all creative endeavor and reduces it to following scripted lesson plans. We believe that teaching is a matter of the heart, that place where intellect meets up with emotion and spirit in constant dialogue with the world around us. Advancing a more democratic vision of education requires us to work toward the elimination of high stakes standardized tests, and the institution of more fair, equitable, and meaningful systems of accountability and assessment of both students and schools.

The current system also alienates students by stripping learning from its engagement with the world in all of its complexity. It reduces learning to test preparation as part of a larger rat race where students are situated within a larger economic competition for dwindling numbers of jobs. We believe that excellence needs to be defined in terms of teachers' abilities to inspire children to engage the world, for it is through such critical engagement that true learning (as opposed to rote memorization) actually occurs. Students living in the 21st century are going to have to deal with a host of problems created by their predecessors: global warming and other ecological disasters, global conflicts, human rights abuses, loss of civil liberties, etc. The curriculum needs to address what students need to know and be able to do in the 21st century to tackle these problems— and it needs to be relevant to students' current interests and concerns.

Progressives must also work diligently to enlist broader and deeper levels of public support for teachers. Teachers matter. Teaching is a public act that bears directly on our collective future. A broader movement in support of democratic and egalitarian reforms in education must include a commitment to ensure that teachers begin receiving salaries commensurate with other professions. At the same time, we must restore and expand teachers' control, in collaboration with students and communities, over decision-making about issues of curriculum and instruction in the classroom – no more scripted teaching, no more mandated outcomes, no more "teacher-proof" curricula. Local control of education rests at the heart of democracy; state and nationally mandated curriculum and assessment are a prescription for totalitarianism.

Children of immigrants make up approximately 20 percent of the children in the United States, bringing linguistic and cultural differences to many classrooms. Added to this are 2.4 million children who speak a language other than English at home. Those of us struggling to defend the public's welfare in public schools need the support of the wider progressive movement to ensure that the learning needs of English language learners are met through caring, multicultural, multi-lingual education. Citizens in a pluralistic democracy, after all, need to value difference and interact with people of differing abilities, orientations, ethnicities, cultures, and dispositions. Our nation as a whole needs to discard outmoded notions of a hypothetical norm, and either describe ALL students as different, or none of them. All classrooms should be inclusive, meeting the needs of all students, together, in a way that is just, caring, challenging, and meaningful.

Because they do not increase the market value of children, arts programs have never been funded at sufficient levels. Under pressure to increase student achievement rates (test scores), school districts in many areas of the country have eliminated art and music classes from their curricula to give students more time to spend preparing for standardized tests. Progressive elements in our society have always supported these programs. We must, however, do more in order to reverse these economically-driven assaults on the arts in schools, hopefully expanding students' opportunities to learn and excel in the fine and performing arts, physical education and sports, and extra-curricular clubs and activities, in order to develop the skills of interaction and responsibility necessary for participation in a robust civil society.

In the end, whether the savage inequalities of neoliberalism—which define current social and national relations as well as approaches to school reform— will be overcome depends on how people organize, respond, learn, and teach in schools. With the help of the progressive press and other media outlets, those engaged in the larger struggle for social, political, and environmental justice can, and must, renew their commitment to educational justice and a democratic vision to guide the functioning of our nation's schools. Concurrently, teachers and educational leaders need to link their own interests in the improvement of teaching and learning to a broad-based movement for social, political, and economic justice, and work together for the democratic renewal of public life and public education in America. Collectively, we must make these commitments and act upon them soon, while public control still exists over the public schools. That control will not last unless we do.

E. Wayne Ross (University of British Columbia), Kathleen Kesson (Long Island University), David Gabbard (East Carolina University), Sandra Mathison (University of British Columbia), and Kevin D. Vinson (University of Arizona) are co-editors of *Defending Public Schools* (published by Praeger).

An article about the manipulation of "scientific data" that shows the lunacy of our present society. If the results don't agree with the government's status quo, they throw it out.

Here is a fascinating account of the flap and the chicanery surrounding the publication of a New York Times article about a report on charter schools.

By Gerald Bracey

Operating in great secrecy for fear of preemptive attacks from the Right, Martin Carnoy at Stanford, Larry Mishel at the Economic Policy Institute and Rebecca Jacobsen and Richard Rothstein at Stanford have written a new book, *The Charter School Dust-up*.

"Dust-up" refers to the events of last August when the *New York Times* reported an analysis of NAEP charter school data indicating kids in charter schools didn't do as well as kids in regular public schools.

The Right went ballistic. They saturated New York papers with op-eds like "Dog Eats AFT Homework" in the *Wall Street Journal* (Paul Peterson and two of his Harvard crew). They made several attempts to dismiss the study simply because it was done by a self-interested teachers union. In fact, the AFT had conducted the analysis because, while the regular 2003 NAEP data had been on the Department of Education's website since September 2003, the charter school data, collected at the same time, remained unreported and the Department showed no inclination to do anything with it. When the AFT forced its hand, the Department finally released a report in December 2004, totally corroborating the AFT's take.

The attacks culminated in a full-page ad signed by 31 academics and funded by uber zealot, Jeanne Allen. Full page ads in the NYT cost at least \$125,000.

The attached essay, simply called "The Ad" recounts the events of August somewhat more colorfully than "Dust-Up" and also reports from the Department's farcical press conference

in December.

At the end, my piece discusses the issue raised by trying to deal with those who prefer ideology to facts and what that might mean for "science."

The book also recounts the events but doesn't do the larger issues piece except to show, person by person, how the zealots use one set of standards for research they approve, and another for research they don't like.

The book also provides a compendious analysis of charter school evaluations from various states. I will have the same available soon in a paper from the Education Policy Studies Laboratory at Arizona State. The difference is my piece is intended more for any reader while the book, though not too technical in most places, is for the authors' peers.

THE AD

When a group of researchers at Stanford University, the Economic Policy Institute, and Columbia University undertook to evaluate charter schools research in early 2005, they undertook it as a stealth project, working in the kind of secrecy normally associated with spies. They told virtually no one about their effort and the few who stumbled on it in conversation were sworn to stay mum until the investigations appeared as a book, *The Charter School Dust-up*. They behaved in this most unusual, un-academic way because, as one of the authors, a person given to sober thought and understatement, told a colleague, "Those people are zealots."

He did not name *those* people. He did not have to. Anyone in the field of education who had followed the swirl of controversy surrounding a 2004 study of charter schools would have been aware that he had in mind, generally, many of the 31 academics who had signed a full page advertisement in the *New York Times* August 25, 2004 and, specifically, Paul Peterson of Harvard who had organized the signatories for the ad and Jeanne Allen, President of the Center for Education Reform who had put up \$125,000 to pay for it. The ad appeared again three weeks later in *Education Week*, minus the signatures of Nobel Prize winner James Heckman of the University of Chicago and David Figlio of the University of Florida who said they had not realized what they were getting into.

They could not have realized what they were getting into because no one in education had ever seen anything like the ad. Aside from those pushing products and services, full page ads in the *Times* typically address some hotly contested issue in the public domain—Israel, Vioxx risks or Social Security, for example. The ad was in reaction to a lone *New York Times* article about test scores in charter schools.

Although educators occasionally write articles on controversial topics that inspire impassioned debate—Arthur Jensen on the heritability of IQ, Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray on the implications of *The Bell Curve*, for instance—the points and counter points mostly remain in the polite discourse of academia and are published in professional journals, literate lay periodicals or the "Commentary" sections of the profession's weeklies, *Education Week* and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Occasionally, debate might spill onto an op-ed page. The ad was something else.

The ad was the culmination of unprecedented attacks on an analysis of National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) charter school data by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and on the *New York Times* for publishing the AFT's findings. NAEP data are normally analyzed and released by the U. S. Department of Education which funds NAEP and operates it through a contract with the Educational

Testing Service in Princeton. The AFT had moved to massage the data because the Department had failed to release its own analyses and showed no signs that it planned to.

In Spring 2003, the Department had added a sample of fourth graders in charter schools to its regular NAEP assessment activities in reading and mathematics (NAEP assessments typically occur in grades 4 and 8 and sometimes 12. Overwhelmingly, though, students in charter schools are in the elementary grades only). By September, 2003, the Department had analyzed the 2003 regular school NAEP data and placed the results on its Website. As of summer, 2004, it had not moved to examine the results from charter schools.

The AFT first offered its report to the Associated Press which declined it. *The New York Times*, experiencing its own difficulties extracting another charter school report from the Department, was more responsive (the contractor for this other study, SRI International, had delivered the final report in June, 2004, but the *Times* would have to use a Freedom of Information Request to get this document and would not be in a position to write about it until November).

With the Department withholding one report and neglecting the data from another, the *Times* might well have suspected that the Department was not pleased with the pictures the data painted. The Department, after all, had supported charters enthusiastically—in addition to a regular grants program for charter schools, in June it had given California \$75 million for new charters. If the NAEP numbers showed charters weren't doing well, taxpayers might question if the money had been well spent.

The *Times* reported the AFT analysis in a front page, above the fold, article on Tuesday, August 17, 2004. Children in charter schools, the article said, did not score as high on the NAEP tests as children in regular public schools. Poor children in charters scored lower than poor children in public schools. Children in central city charter schools scored lower than children in central city public schools. Black students in charter schools didn't differ from blacks in public schools but the black-white achievement gap was as large in charters as it was in public schools. The *Times* story carried the headline, "Nation's Charter Schools Lagging Behind, U. S. Test Scores Reveal." Those people read the headline and saw: "*Times* to Charter Schools: Drop Dead."

The next day, all hell broke loose.

On Wednesday, August 18, the *Times* carried a second story, Section A, but not page one, largely devoted to quotes from then-Secretary of Education, Rod Paige, defending charters. Harvard's Peterson, William Howell and Martin West penned an op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal*, "Dog Eats AFT Homework." Editors at the *Chicago Tribune* struck a similar chord of ridicule, calling the study, "as new as a lava lamp, as revelatory as an old sock and as significant as a belch."

The Tuesday *Times* article had quoted former assistant secretary of education and charter advocate, Chester E. Finn, Jr., saying "The scores are low, dismayingly low" (Finn's Thomas B. Fordham Foundation sponsors charters in Dayton, Ohio). But Wednesday found Finn recovered from his dismay and on the attack in the *New York Post*: "This week's firestorm over the performance of charter schools can be traced to a mischief bearing grenade hand-delivered by the charter hating American Federation of Teachers to the *New York Times*."

Finn's characterization of the reaction as a "firestorm" is curious and telling. From the first *Times* article to Finn's op-ed only 24 hours had elapsed. Nothing else had appeared in print before Finn's reaction. If there was a "firestorm," it was internal, raging over the phones, faxes, and emails of those people (charter advocates who were veterans of the left-leaning Alternative Schools and Free Schools movements of the Sixties and Seventies

kept their counsel).

Which is not to say that after Wednesday the firestorm metaphor was not accurate. *Those* people managed op-ed placement in virtually every New York daily, a feat that assuredly required coordination. The inferno blazed on the next day. On Thursday, August 19, the Reverend Floyd Flake, identified by the *Times* as a former New York Congressman (but not also identified as the President of the Charter Schools Division of Edison Schools, Inc.), pleaded for charters on the *Times* op-ed page. Allen debated the AFT's Bella Rosenberg about the study on National Public Radio's Tavis Smiley Show while the Department of Education sent Nina Shokraii Rees to do similar battle on "The News Hour With Jim Lehrer" (Rees came to the Department from the Heritage Foundation, once characterized by *Los Angeles Times* editor, Michael Kinsley, as a "propaganda machine masquerading as a think tank").

The Manhattan Institute's Jay P. Greene, a Peterson protégé, called the study "sheer nonsense" in the *New York Sun*. At the Center for Education Reform's website Allen wrote, "The AFT has been working on their plan for months to twist NAEP data and attack the nation's unsuspecting 3000 charter schools with a full-force media blitz." How a single article in one paper, even an eminent paper such as the *Times*, could constitute a "full-force media blitz," Ms. Allen did not explain. The *New York Post*, having published Finn's op-ed the previous day, now weighed in with its own editorial, "Kids Come Last." "The AFT hates them (charter schools) because they threaten the union's public school monopoly."

Neither Finn nor the *Post* seemed aware of the irony of their savaging the AFT's position on charters. Without the AFT, there probably wouldn't be any charter schools. Ray Budde, a Massachusetts teacher coined the term in the 1970's and it generated little interest until championed by then-AFT president, Albert Shanker, in the 1980's at the AFT's national convention and in his weekly *New York Times* column. A Shanker Minneapolis speech led directly to the Minnesota legislature passing the nation's first charter school law in 1991. Shanker soon became disenchanted with charters, though, seeing them divisive, self-sealed entities: "the basic principle of charter schools ensures that whatever common ground schools now share will disappear."

The word "contract" can be substituted for "charter" with no loss of meaning. The contract that charter schools offered was this: we will remain public schools, but let us have increased autonomy in what the school teaches and how the school is run. Free us from the bureaucratic burdens of the rules and regulations that afflict public schools. In return, we will increase achievement. If we fail to improve achievement, we will cease to exist. Five years after the Minnesota law was passed, the University of Minnesota's Joe Nathan, a long-time friend of alternative schools, characterized the bargain this way: "Hundreds of charter schools have been created around this nation by educators who are willing to put their jobs on the line and say 'If we can't improve students' achievement, close down our school.' That is accountability—clear, specific, and real."

Other charter advocates had gone beyond Nathan's improve-or-die criterion and argued that the real purpose of a charter school was not just to improve achievement in that school. That was secondary. The primary purpose of a charter school was to act as a "laboratory of innovation" and stimulate improved achievement in the entire system.

Given the charters' promissory note, a study finding that charter school students did not even keep pace with their peers in public schools would be a hard blow to the charter school movement as a viable instrument of education reform. Such a study in 2004 would cause not only the charter school movement to weaken. The day after the original article, a *New York Times* editorial called the AFT analysis a "devastating setback" to Bush's signature education program, No Child Left Behind. Under the terms of that law, schools that repeatedly fail to make as much annual progress as the law requires can convert to

charter school status. But charters performing lower than regular schools would render the conversion option meaningless.

While the *Times* editorial probably added to the impact of the study, a simultaneous event on the left coast also affected charters' image. From the start of the charter school movement, some observers had feared that the charters schools' increased autonomy increased the risk of fiscal malfeasance and fraud. A number of stories had indeed documented horrible conditions in some charter schools. One charter school student in Texas described his charter school that had no desks, no chairs, no textbooks, no chalkboards, no trash cans, no gymnasium, no lunchroom, no vending machines, and no functioning toilet this way: "If you name it, we don't have it." Other stories told how money intended for instruction got siphoned into other projects, such as purchasing a nice home for the school operator's mother. The day before the *New York Times* charter piece, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that a charter operator in California, under investigation for possible criminal activities such as inflating enrollments to obtain more money from the state, had suddenly closed down 60 charter school campuses, leaving hundreds of employees without jobs and 10,000 students without schools three weeks before the start of the fall term. The *New York Times'* article cited the *Los Angeles Times'* story.

After the editorial and op-ed assaults on the AFT and the *Times* came the ad. It was headlined "Charter School Evaluation Reported by *New York Times* Fails to Meet Professional Standards." The ad can be accessed at [a location at the Center for Education Reform's web site](#) .

"We the undersigned members of the research community," it began, "are dismayed by the prominent, largely uncritical coverage given by The *New York Times* to a study of charter schools by the American Federation of Teachers.... The study in question does not meet current professional research standards." By referring to the analysis as a "study" by the AFT rather than an analysis of NAEP data by the AFT, the ad continued the thrust of several op-eds portraying the research as wholly and self-servingly conducted by the union (one website even called the analysis "nefarious").

The ad impugned the quality of the data and the analysis, and chastised the *Times* for reporting it. Under the heading "Journalistic Responsibility," the ad declared, "The news media has [sic] an obligation to assess carefully any research sponsored by interest groups engaged in policy debates. Such studies need to be vetted by independent scholars, as is commonly done in coverage of research on the biological and physical sciences."

These flaws the signers found in the research, in the *Times* journalism, and the standards the signers put forth to eliminate such failings, struck other researchers as odd or even hypocritical: some of the signers' own researches did not meet the "professional standards" described in the ad. Writing in *The American Prospect*, Economic Policy Institute researcher, Lawrence Mishel observed, "Many of these guardians of professional research standards have repeatedly violated the principles they now proclaim." As if to further undercut the ad's authority, one of the signatories, Caroline Hoxby of Harvard, rushed a pro-charter study into print--on her web site, at least, not in a report vetted by independent scholars--and summarized her research as an op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal*. Hoxby's research failed to live up to the principles in the ad and, perhaps due to the haste, also contained errors of fact.

With the data abroad in the land, the U. S. Department of Education now moved to report them. The Department report, released on December 15, 2004, affirmed the AFT's analysis. Of 22 comparisons in reading and mathematics, 20 favored public school children. Hispanic fourth-graders in charters scored one point higher than Hispanic fourth-graders in public schools in reading (201 vs. 199), and white fourth-graders in the two types of schools tied.

At the press conference announcing the report, then-Deputy Secretary of Education, Eugene Hickok, reiterated the Department's charter support: "We're big fans of charter schools." Hickok also asserted that "Charter schools that don't work, don't stay open." Diana Jean Schemo, the *New York Times* reporter who had written the August story found this a curious statement. She and fellow *Times* reporter, Sam Dillon had had to use a Freedom of Information Act request to obtain the earlier SRI International charter study and that study had stated flatly:

Charter schools rarely face sanctions (revocation or nonrenewal). Furthermore, authorizing bodies impose sanctions on charter schools because of problems related to compliance with regulations and school finances, rather than student performance. Authorizers (of charters) have difficulty closing schools that are having problems (emphases in the original).

The ad and the Department of Education's actions renewed an oft-voiced concern about the Bush administration and politically oriented researchers, that they subordinate science to ideology (in November 2003, President George W. Bush named three of the ad's signers, Eric Hanushek, Caroline Hoxby, and Herbert Walberg to the 15-member National Board of Education Sciences which oversees the Department of Education's Institute for Educational Sciences). The Union of Concerned Scientists had earlier accused the administration of deliberately manipulating, suppressing and ignoring scientific advice it did not agree with while stacking advisory panels only with people who had met an ideological litmus test. Representative Henry Waxman, labeled "science's political bulldog" by *Scientific American*, established a web site called "Politics and Science" to report on the administration's failures to separate the two. In the *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, Ron Suskind observed of Bush's presidency, "open dialogue, based on facts, is not seen as something of inherent value."

The troubling issues raised by the ad and its signers, by Hickok contradicting a report commissioned by his own office, and by the administration generally were framed by Harvard psychologist, Howard Gardner:

Is science a disinterested effort to find out what the world is really like...or is science simply a tool that we use to promote a certain point of view that we have and if the evidence supports us, great, and if not we squelch it or we don't put it on the web...The question we have to ask ourselves is, Do we want to live in a world where you can't count on scientists calling it the way it is, or simply accept that there are scientists on the left and scientists on the right?

The existence of the ad and the many volleys hurled at the analysis and the article indicate that, in some quarters at least, there are researchers with little interest in what the world is really like, what the data really say, with calling it the way it is.

STATE: TESTS LOSING VALUE; EDUCATORS FEEL STYMIED BY LAW
Hartford Courant -- March 28, 2005
by Robert A. Frahm

After spending five years and millions of dollars measuring schoolchildren on the latest version of the Connecticut Mastery Test,

what progress have public schools made?

State officials say they can't be sure.

The reason? The federal No Child Left Behind Act.

The law - the centerpiece of President Bush's school reform agenda - has altered test procedures and required testing thousands of additional students with learning problems or English-speaking difficulties, making it difficult to compare Connecticut's latest scores with previous results, officials said.

"The [federal] rules keep changing about which youngsters to test from year to year," state Education Commissioner Betty J. Sternberg said. "It's really tough to say if you've been having an effect because you're testing such different groups of kids."

Today, the state is scheduled to issue its annual report on statewide results of the reading, mathematics and writing test.

The report is being released as Sternberg and other officials, including state legislators, step up criticism of the No Child Left Behind Act. Like several other states, Connecticut has clashed with the federal government over interpretation of the 3-year-old law, highlighting sharp differences of opinion on how to measure academic progress, particularly on matters such as testing students with disabilities and children who do not speak English.

In recent weeks, the U.S. Department of Education has signaled a willingness to reconsider some of those questions, but has said some issues, such as requiring an expansion of Connecticut's testing program, are not negotiable.

The federal law, Sternberg said, "is ill-fitting and doesn't follow the values we have with regard to teaching and testing and learning."

Connecticut's 20-year-old mastery test of fourth-, sixth- and eighth-graders is regarded as among the most rigorous in the nation. Earlier this month, U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings rejected Sternberg's request for a waiver on the federal law's requirement to expand testing to also include grades 3, 5 and 7.

The state is gearing up to add the new tests next year - something officials say will cost millions of dollars without much benefit.

"It is not going to provide us with any more information than we already know," state Sen. Thomas P. Gaffey, D-Meriden, said as the state Senate passed a resolution last week urging Congress and Bush to amend No Child Left Behind and allow waivers for states such as Connecticut with strong records of academic success.

Gaffey, co-chairman of the legislature's education committee, described No Child Left Behind as "an historic intrusion of the federal government onto states' administration of education."

Other states, including some that are strong Republican strongholds for Bush, have challenged the law, asking for more flexibility. Bush's home

state of Texas, for example, has decided to follow its own rules for counting special education students in test score results rather than the federal government's stricter standard. The Utah Senate's Republican caucus told Bush that Utah is prepared to pass a bill allowing state education laws to take precedence over portions of the federal law.

The challenges from some states "are the manifestation of some of the frustration they're feeling when they're told there will be flexibility [in the law], and then they run into a brick wall," said David L. Shreve of the National Conference of State Legislatures.

That organization issued a report last month saying the law is too rigid and creates "too many ways to fail."

The report said, "This assertion of federal authority into an area historically reserved to the states has had the effect of curtailing additional state innovations and undermining many that had occurred during the past three decades."

No Child Left Behind calls for a shake-up of schools that fail to make sufficient gains. The law is aimed at closing the academic achievement gap that finds some groups of students, such as racial minorities and children from low-income families, lagging behind others.

Schools that receive federal Title I money to help educate poor children and fail to make sufficient progress face increasingly stiff sanctions under the law, eventually including a complete reorganization of the school. A school can be cited even if a single group - such as special education students or low-income children - fails to make adequate progress. Many of the schools that have been singled out so far are from urban areas that include large numbers of low-income families, special education students and non-English speaking children.

Across the country, many educators have complained that the law is punitive and puts too much emphasis on testing.

"These kids are just being tested to death," said Joanna Brother, a fifth-grade teacher at Edgerton School in New London, where she teaches children who speak little or no English. "How do you possibly measure a child's academic knowledge in a language the child doesn't speak?"

In Connecticut, Sternberg said the state already has a strong testing system to identify which students and which schools need help.

Among other things, Sternberg has asked U.S. officials to allow selected special education students to take tests below their grade level - a practice Connecticut schools have used for years. Under No Child Left Behind, the state not only has tested thousands more special education students, but is required to test them at their grade level.

Sternberg has been backed by other state officials, including Gov. M. Jodi Rell.

Rell, through a spokesman, issued a statement saying, "It seems like education officials in Washington want us to spend more money on tests when Connecticut has been a leader in testing since the mid-1980s. ...

The best way to meet [students'] needs is to put more resources in the classroom, not conduct more testing."

Allan B. Taylor, chairman of the State Board of Education, sharply disagreed with views expressed in a commentary in The Courant last week by Spellings, the U.S. education secretary.

Taylor disputed Spellings' claim that Connecticut's lowest-performing students in the past were "hidden behind district-wide averages." Long before No Child Left Behind, Taylor said, Connecticut issued annual reports detailing the performance of various groups of students such as low-income children and members of minority groups.

Spellings also criticized Sternberg's request for a waiver on testing students annually in every grade, suggesting that "adults in charge of [children's] education surely know better."

Taylor said there is no evidence that annual tests in every grade will speed up the growth of low-performing students, adding that, "Secretary Spellings' use of the political campaign tactics of distortion and sarcasm is not worthy of the issues or her office."

<http://www.courant.com/news/education/hc-mastery0328.artmar28,0,1967490.story?coll=hc-headlines-education>

From California:

Panel recommends delaying exit exam for disabled students

By Laurel Rosenhall -- Bee Staff Writer

Published Sunday, March 27, 2005

<http://www.sacbee.com/content/news/education/story/12631698p-13485574c.html>

Therese Musgrave brushed tears from her cheeks as she watched her daughter speak.

"I don't mind taking a test for high school, but just make it at my level," Meghan Musgrave said.

The freckled 14-year-old spoke Wednesday to a panel of statewide educators who will advise the Legislature next month on whether to keep the California High School Exit Exam as a graduation requirement for students with disabilities.

"I read at a third-grade level. In eighth grade they tried to put me in fourth-grade reading, and I couldn't do it," said Musgrave, a freshman at Antioch High School who studies vigilantly and has gone through years of tutoring.

"You guys are basically telling me I'll have to take a test that is like a foreign language to me."

For now, the exit exam remains a graduation requirement for all students in California public schools in the class of 2006 and beyond.

In a draft report, the advisory panel recommends delaying the requirement for two years for students with disabilities. During that time, they urge further research to come up with other ways these students can prove what they've learned.

Blindness, paralysis, dyslexia and attention deficit are just some of the disabilities that can land a student in special education. The vast number and diversity of disabilities makes a standardized test like the exit exam a conundrum for policy-makers and a frustration for parents and students.

"A one-size test does not fit all," said Rebecca Serafin, whose learning-disabled daughter is a high school junior in Morgan Hill.

"My hope is this board will approve a special test for special ed students that is written to their level."

Students with disabilities are entitled to take the exam with variations that correspond with their "individualized education programs," documents that guide instruction in special education. The test comes in Braille, large print and audio versions for students with vision problems. Students who can't hold a pencil can dictate their answers to a scribe. Students who have a hard time reading can have a teacher read the test aloud. Calculators are permitted for some students.

But solutions can be difficult to come by for students like Musgrave, whose disabilities may make it impossible to learn algebra, read at a high school level or master other skills that are tested on the exit exam.

Among students who took the test last year as 10th-graders, about 75 percent passed the English portion and a similar portion passed the math. But among special education students, the pass rate was far lower: about 30 percent passed English and about the same number passed math.

Students who didn't pass the first time have five more chances to take the test. But an independent evaluation of the exam says there's been "no significant improvement in passing rates for students receiving special education services."

The advisory panel discussed the possibility of granting students with disabilities who don't pass the exam an alternate diploma, such as a certificate showing the student had completed required coursework. But parents opposed that idea.

"I am completely outraged," said Therese Musgrave.

"Anything less than a high school diploma for these kids is an extreme insult."

The panel also discussed whether, instead of an exam, students with disabilities should be able to submit other kinds of proof of their learning. The draft report recommends further exploration of this option during the two-year delay.

Panelists disagreed on whether postponing the requirement was a good idea. Some felt there should be no delay, some felt a longer delay was needed and some said two years was appropriate.

Panel member David Smith, a professor of deaf education at California State University, Fresno, addressed the group through an interpreter who spoke as Smith signed:

"I agree with the two-year extension," he said. "Mostly because changes take time."

Even with more time to prepare students for the exam, some panelists said it still might not be feasible for everyone to pass.

For some students, "passing the California High School Exit Exam could be an unrealistic expectation," said Ellen Gervase, a member of the advisory panel and a teacher in the Pomona Unified School District.

Those students were the focus of much of Wednesday's discussion. Panel member and special education teacher Stacy Begin read a letter written by Brandon Madura, one of her students at El Camino High School in Oceanside:

"I have had to work harder and study longer, so I could keep my grades up," he wrote. "I have done this because I know how important my education will be to my future."

Madura wrote that he has tried several times to pass the exit exam, but failed because he has not learned much of the material it covers.

"I don't think I should have to take any test if I have not already taken the class," he wrote. "I feel like I am being punished for being in special ed." Letter to the editor, LA Times, published March 24,

Many students with disabilities see the exit exam as a roadblock to the future. What kinds of jobs, they wonder, will they be able to hold without a high school diploma?

Serafin's daughter, Amanda, enjoys drawing and dreams of becoming a computer animator. Musgrave, the Antioch student, wants to work some day as a massage therapist. If that doesn't work out, she said, she'd like to join the military.

All of those jobs require a high school diploma. If the exit exam requirement stays in place for all students, Serafin said her family is considering moving to another state so her daughter can earn a diploma.

About the writer: The Bee's Laurel Rosenhall can be reached at (916) 321-1083 or lrosenhall@sacbee.com.

Letter to the editor, LA Times, published March 24,
2005
Amy Freeman

I have the solution to the nursing shortage:

- Reduce funding to all public hospitals so they can no longer afford to buy proper medical equipment.
- Raise the nurse-to-patient ratio to make it nearly impossible for nurses to give patients the required attention.
- Make nurses responsible whenever a patient dies, regardless of lifestyle factors, (i.e., smoking, diet), disease, age, income and heredity, or whether a patient listens to medical advice.
- Put nurses on a merit pay system where their rate of pay is determined by their patients' health. Test living patients yearly to determine their healthfulness. Deaths or unhealthiness among patients will result in a pay and status reduction for the nurse.

These sure-fire techniques will definitely boost the health and well-being of all patients in California hospitals. It's working for our schools, isn't it?

Amy Freeman
Teacher, Long Beach

printed in the Oakland Tribune, Sat. Mar. 26:
http://www.insidebayarea.com/localnews/cj_2623706

Notice the assumption that all urban superintendents must now be "trained" by the right-wing Broad Foundation...

Is Bobb destined for city schools?

IS former City Manager Robert Bobb getting ready to return to Oakland from his present job in the nation's capital?

It sure looks like it, but he didn't return my calls for comment. If he does, he could be wearing a different hat than he has in the past.

Bobb, now city administrator of Washington, D.C., might be thinking of taking on the job currently held by Randolph Ward, state administrator for the Oakland public schools.

Do I hear cheers from the gallery?

I can think of a few teachers and parents who would trade Ward for Bobb in a quick minute even if it didn't mean the return of local control of the Oakland Board of Education. At least not right away.

Here's why Bobb could end up heading the Oakland school system in just a few months.

He's enrolled as a fellow in the Eli Broad Foundation's academy for urban school superintendents in Dallas, which is the same program Ward attended, as did the recently departed, highly placed Oakland Administrator Woody Carter, who assumed the superintendency of the Fairfield public schools. Let Bobb speak for himself as he does on the Broad academy Web site:

"Throughout my 35-year career as a city administrator, I have managed large cities that face the challenges of complex infrastructures, social problems and at-risk educational system. The talents and resources of all facets of community, government and business must come together for the success of education. After a career serving the broader needs of the public today, I am ready to focus my expertise on the needs of tomorrow."

And why not in Oakland, where his family lives in a home they own and where Bobb is still well-connected with the community as president of the African American Chamber of Commerce?

He visits frequently and is expected to be around Oakland this weekend for the Easter observance.

Bobb is enrolled in the class of 2005, which attends a series of weekend conferences that train superintendents in Dallas, home of the Broad Foundation, which has a special interest in improving urban school districts.

But most pertinent to the possible assumption of the Oakland job is his sense of a community's need to be involved in its schools, and to be included in decision-making.

The foundation program turns out superintendents almost as fast as pancakes, placing them in districts like Oakland.

The academy for superintendents program only selects "fast learners" who are already highly qualified managers with weighty resumes to become fellows. The program is by invitation only.

Some larger California cities that may be getting Broad academy graduates include Hayward, West Contra Costa and Glendale.

Another California city on the foundation's list of cities interested in getting a Broad superintendent is Compton, where Ward was superintendent for several years before coming to Oakland two years ago. Sounds like that city is still in trouble.

Bobb was city manager of Oakland until two years ago, when Mayor Jerry Brown fired him over persistent disputes on major policy positions. Their major difference came over whether the uptown project Brown wants for residential housing, as part of the larger downtown renewal, should instead be a ballpark for the Athletics. Bobb was openly advocating the ballpark, while Brown was holding fast to his plan for housing.

After his termination, Bobb landed on his feet, snagging the plum job of city administrator of Washington, D.C., where he oversees and works closely with the deputy mayors, which are comparable to Oakland's City Council members.

Fellows in the Broad Academy for Urban Superintendents are instructed by a faculty composed of corporate CEOs, high-level government officials, nonprofit executives and educational policy-makers.

They attend seven weekend sessions and 10 months of mentoring by current and retired superintendents who serve as faculty advisers.

Testing Link to School Disruption

Ohanian Comment: It's sad that Britain, where we once looked for inspiration and leadership in teaching, now seems to be suffering under a worse system even than we have.

Disruption in schools has risen with a narrowing curriculum and more testing, a teachers' leader has said.

Hilary Bills, this year's president of the National Union of Teachers, told its annual conference the curriculum was "prescriptive".

And there were not enough places on a calculator to work out how many times a pupil would be tested in school.

The government insists testing is "here to stay" and parents are entitled to know how well schools are performing.

'Scandal'

Mrs Bills, who is a primary school head teacher in Sandwell in the West Midlands, said a child leaving primary school in England would have had 1,140 daily literacy hours.

"Enough to turn even the most avid reader and writer off the subject."

But it was "a scandal" for politicians to suggest one in four pupils left primary school "unable to read and write" just because they had not attained an arbitrary test level.

The government's primary school strategy encouraged schools to have a more creative curriculum.

But there was still a sense that a school that did experiment with the curriculum was being "brave".

Managements feared an Ofsted inspection that decided "being brave" had not worked.

League tables

In their final year of primary school, children had a very limited curriculum from September to May as they prepared for their Sats tests.

"The pressure of teaching with the threat of a school's position in a league table must be removed," she said.

"How come parents in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales manage to choose a school for their children without the assistance of a league table?"

Mrs Bills asked delegates whether they had seen the Conservative Party poster which said "What's wrong with discipline in schools?"

The party has made discipline one of its key election issues.

"Well actually there's very little wrong with discipline in schools," she said.

Even the inspectorate, Ofsted, agreed the vast majority of children behaved in a "totally acceptable" manner.

Swearing

But schools had to deal with the issues children brought into them.

It was not teachers who sold knives or drugs to children, or gave them the impression that swearing and being abusive was acceptable.

"The answer to this worrying trend in its entirety is beyond me at this point," she said.

"But I don't believe it is a coincidence that the level of disruption in schools has risen at the same time as the curriculum has been narrowed and testing has increased."

She also complained that "the balance between the rights of pupils and the rights of teachers are too often tipped in favour of the pupil".

The "no win, no fee" culture was encouraging pupils and parents to question teachers' actions.

Society as a whole needed to take responsibility for young people.

Schools would play their part but needed the right level of funding to do it.

It would benefit the country in the long run, "spending the money now on education rather than having packed prisons in the future".

— Gary Eason

BBC News

2005-03-26

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/4384399.stm>

My letter to state legislature re: HB 0813

To Our Distinguished State Lawmakers:

I agree with my colleague, Colleen Smith, that accreditation through early childhood organizations is an excellent concept and much more appropriate than accreditation from organizations that do not specialize in early childhood. Organizations such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) have done the research to determine what is best for children below the age of six. I serve on the professional development panel for NAEYC and understand how they accredit places of learning for young children. Please amend the law to reflect exceptions to licensure requirements by national early childhood organizations.

I read in the paper today that Barksdale endorsed 813. That thought is scary to me. It brings home the idea that movement of licensure to DHS is politically and economically motivated. It is clear that the needs of young

children and their families are not at the heart of the matter.

The benevolent Barksdale family has made a name for themselves through stealing childhoods from Mississippi's children under the guise of "teaching reading". They know nothing of child development or developmentally appropriate practice. The proponents of their program confuse the foundations of reading - visual discrimination skills, patterning, spatial relations, phonemic awareness, language acquisition, and motor skills - with phonics instruction. The previously documented benefits of early education are being lost on a daily basis with the introduction of phonics workbooks and worksheets.

Julia Todd is buying into the Barksdale trap because "they have the money." (That's what she told me at the MECA convention in 2004.) I'm sorry but I will not prostitute good, solid, research based educational practice for the Barksdale's money. I hope that you won't either. It will take years to undo the damage done by these philanthropists in Mississippi. How many more teenagers will die from violence, drugs, and sexually transmitted disease before people realize the real benefits of early childhood education - safety, socialization, & positive self image?

Earlier this year, I received a copy of a memo from Ms. Todd to Mr. Taylor at DHS. It detailed how much money she has saved during 2004. It amounted to roughly \$250,000.00. She did not say where the Child Care Registration fees were now coming from. She did not say who was going to pay for the equipment for the WIN Center. I always question a financial statement that doesn't show debits and credits. I hope that you do too.

Finally, let me remind you of the wisdom involved in placing Child Care Licensure under the Department of Health many years ago. First and foremost, the needs of children begin with health and safety (Maslow, 1964). No one is more qualified to be certain that these needs are being met than the health department. Secondly, there would be no conflict of interest in who gets vouchers for child care. The check and balance system works reasonably well. Thirdly, the health department has already begun a program to train licensure personnel in the needs of young children. Let them finish what they have started.

My dear legislators, please keep in mind the needs of young children. Do not be politically or economically motivated in your decision making. Many of you were here before Governor Barbour took office, and you will be here when he's gone. Do not create more situations that will need to be cleaned up in the future.

If I may be of assistance to anyone, please contact me at any of the addresses and phone numbers below.

Thank you for your forbearance.

For the children,

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Education on Lockdown: The Schoolhouse to Jailhouse Track

Susan Ohanion Notes: I hope everyone reads this important report. There is much to respond to, but one thing occurs to me immediately: By criminalizing student behavior that in past decades wouldn't even have merited a detention, schools find a way to get probable low scorers off their books. Get these young people into the justice system, and the schools can wash their hands of any pretense of educating them. So higher graduation rates and higher test scores come on the backs of these young people put on the jailhouse track.

**By Advancement Project in partnership with
Padres and Jovenes Unidos
Southwest Youth Collaborative
Children & Family Justice Center of Northwestern University School of Law**

March 2005

Executive Summary

Education on Lockdown: The Schoolhouse to Jailhouse Track, is Advancement Project's second examination of the emergence of zero tolerance school discipline policies and how these policies have pushed students away from an academic track to a future in the juvenile justice system. School districts have teamed up with law enforcement to create this "schoolhouse to jailhouse track" by imposing a "double dose" of punishment - suspensions or expulsions and a trip to the juvenile court - for one act of childish misconduct.

This report is intended to ignite a dialogue about the negative side effects of the use of law and order approaches to address typical student misbehavior, and to encourage efforts toward reform. *Education on Lockdown* profiles three school districts - Denver, Chicago and Palm Beach County - where this track is in full operation and where communities are beginning to realize and address its adverse impact.

This report dissects the schoolhouse to jailhouse track by examining:

- How zero tolerance, a policy originally designed to address the most serious misconduct, morphed into a "take no prisoners" approach to school discipline issues and created a direct track into the juvenile and criminal justice systems;
- The expanding role of law enforcement measures in schools;
- The disparate impact of these practices on students of color; and
- How the track is unfolding in: Denver, Chicago, and Palm Beach County.

The first section of *Education on Lockdown* zeros in on zero tolerance with a discussion of the evolution of zero tolerance in public schools.

Zero tolerance, a term taken from the war on drugs (where law enforcement agencies swiftly and harshly responded to drug offenders), was initiated in school districts in numerous states during a juvenile crime wave in the late 1980's. Congress later passed the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994, which required states to enact laws mandating that schools expel any student found on school property with a firearm. Many states, however, went above and beyond the federal mandate, passing laws that required expulsion

or suspension for the possession of all weapons, drugs and other serious violations on or around school grounds.

In recent years, traditional school punishments have been supplemented by criminal penalties. Even non-violent acts are now subject to citations (tickets) or arrests and referrals to juvenile or criminal courts. In fact, in many instances the charges (e.g., battery for pouring a carton of chocolate milk over the head of a classmate) would never constitute a crime if an adult were involved. Schools have unreasonably raised the stakes for certain adolescent behaviors.

In the second section of the report we examine the changing role of police in schools.

There is much debate about how to improve school safety. Many districts have taken the easiest route – increasing the number of police patrolling hallways and giving them a greater role in disciplinary matters. In a growing number of schools, police are hired on a full-time basis.

These officers are often assigned from local police departments to augment the school security staff. In other places, such as Houston, Palm Beach County, and Los Angeles, school districts have established their own police force.

Also, in an attempt to improve safety, schools have beefed up security measures to include: cameras, metal detectors, tasers, canine units, and biometric hand readers.

While these measures produce a perception of safety, there is little or no evidence that they create safer learning environments or change disruptive behaviors. There is however, evidence that these tactics unnecessarily thrust more youth into an unforgiving penal system.

The third section of the report examines the disproportionate impact that zero tolerance policies have on children of color.

Racial disparities in school discipline have been documented for over thirty years. With the increased presence of police in public schools, mandatory punishments, and the expanded use of suspensions and expulsions, students of color are getting pushed out or thrown out of schools at alarming rates. While anecdotes help to tell the schoolhouse to jailhouse story, the data included in this report also illustrates the grim picture students of color face in school.

Across the board, the data shows that Black and Latino students are more likely than their White peers to be arrested in school, regardless of the demographics of the school's enrollment. Researchers conclude that racial disparities cannot be accounted for by the socioeconomic status of students. Nor is there any evidence that Black and Latino students misbehave more than their White peers. Race does, however,

correlate with the severity of the punishment imposed with students of color receiving harsher punishments for less severe behavior.

The fourth section of the report tells the tale of three school districts by mapping their schoolhouse to jailhouse tracks.

DENVER, COLORADO

Like most school districts across the country, Denver Public Schools (DPS) has drawn a line in the sand and is taking a zero tolerance approach to school discipline by using both school disciplinary measures and police involvement to address even the most trivial acts of student misconduct.

The dramatic rise in expulsions, suspensions, and referrals to law enforcement (through citations (tickets) and arrests) in DPS demonstrates that it is zealously cracking down on youthful behaviors. For example, between 2000 and 2004, DPS experienced a 71% increase in the

number of student referrals to law enforcement.

Most of these referrals were for non-violent, subjective behavior such as bullying and use of obscenities. Students of color are the target of these over zealous discipline practices. Black and Latino students are 70% more likely to be disciplined (suspended, expelled, or ticketed) than their White peers.

In Denver, school referrals to law enforcement typically result in a visit to juvenile court. These students are often placed on probation for up to a year or sent to a diversion program. Many parents, students and court officials believe that minor offenses should be resolved by the schools and not the juvenile court. The research shows that DPS's practice of shifting the responsibility of school discipline to school police and juvenile courts simply does not work, and more needs to be done to keep students in school and out of the juvenile justice system.

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Chicago Public Schools (CPS) has become infamous for its harsh zero tolerance policies. Although there is no verified positive impact on safety, these policies have resulted in tens- of-thousands of student suspensions and an increasing number of expulsions. The trend in Chicago has been difficult to document, largely because of the District's refusal to provide data to advocates. Where data has been published, it is often conflicting or inexplicable. However, even by its own numbers, CPS has aggressively ignited a schoolhouse to jailhouse track that is ravaging this generation of youth.

For example, in 2003 over 8,000 students were arrested in CPS. More than 40% of these arrests were for simple assaults or batteries which involve no serious injuries or weapons and are often nothing more than threats or minor fights.

Seventy-seven (77%) of the arrests were of Black

students even though they constituted only 50% of the student enrollment.

Most of these cases are so minor that institutions beyond the schoolhouse doors dismiss them or send the youth involved to diversion programs. While it appears that the State's Attorney and Chicago's juvenile court system often spare youths from the devastation of the schoolhouse-to-jailhouse track by diverting most cases out of court, CPS is working at odds with the courts – aggressively suspending, expelling, and insisting on the arrest of youths regardless of fundamental principles of fairness and necessity.

PALM BEACH COUNTY, FLORIDA

In Advancement Project's initial report documenting the unrelenting criminalization of students, we noted the continuing problem of the overuse of suspensions and the rising number of arrests by Palm Beach County School District Police for minor conduct. Public defenders and Legal Aid attorneys provided accounts that demonstrated that all too often students in Palm Beach County were being thrown into the juvenile justice system for instances that should have been handled by schools.

In the almost two years since the release of the first report, the number of arrests has only slightly declined; complaints remain that too many youth are being arrested for petty acts that would never result in an arrest and prosecution in the real world. With 1,105 arrests of students in 2003, 64% of these arrests were Black youth, who account for only 29% of enrollment.

Further, it appears that the Palm Beach County State's Attorney's office continues to go overboard in prosecuting harmless behavior – assisting in the needless criminalization of Palm Beach County youth.

In the final analysis:

Schools continue to be safe havens for America's children. Rare occurrences of serious school violence, however, have caused school districts around the country to grapple with the issue of school safety. While many agree that schools should be safe and conducive to learning; the way to achieve these goals is very much in dispute.

Right now, schools are overreaching by inappropriately adopting law enforcement strategies that are leading students unnecessarily into the juvenile or criminal justice systems. Through zero tolerance school discipline policies, some schools seem to be opting to discard students who are perceived as troublemakers and who could potentially disrupt learning. These strategies are being employed without regard for teaching youths how to change behavior, using punishments that fit the conduct, or acknowledging adolescent development.

These issues are not easy. Of course, school safety is important, however, a delicate balancing act must be applied. Research has shown that prevention and intervention programs are the most effective methods for addressing school violence and creating a productive learning environment. It is also more cost effective

than hurling students into the juvenile justice system. State and local policy makers must examine the effectiveness of their school discipline policies and programs and take steps toward reforming this failing system. Some initial solutions follow:

- School districts should limit suspensions, expulsions and arrests to conduct that pose a serious threat to safety.
- Schools should adopt clear and concise school discipline guidelines that provide students and parents with notice of potential disciplinary actions for specific offenses.
- School districts should establish discipline oversight committees to handle complaints about school discipline practices and review discipline and arrest statistics to ensure that discipline is meted out in a fair, nondiscriminatory manner.
- Schools should adopt and provide adequate resources for school violence prevention and intervention programs that have been assessed for effectiveness.
- Schools districts need funding resources expand their staff of guidance counselors and social workers who should provide counseling and support to students experiencing behavior and academic problems.
- School police should receive special training on how to effectively interact with youths and children with disabilities.

— The Advancement Project

<http://www.stopschoolstojails.org/Report%20Breakout/FINALEOLrep.pdf>

One size fits very few!!! blf

Zero Tolerance Remains Divisive

Barbara Anderson says her daughter cries without provocation and shows signs of depression since the 13-year-old was expelled from Chapin Middle School a month ago.

The eighth-grader now attends Lexington-Richland 5's alternative school for students who have trouble staying in a regular classroom.

"For someone like (my daughter), this place is the kiss of death," Anderson said of her student, who had earned above-average grades at her former school.

Anderson, a former District 5 teacher, insists her child is telling the truth when she says a classmate tricked her into taking a sip from a drink spiked with tequila on school grounds. As Mormons, Anderson said, "drinking is not part of our family culture."

But District 5's zero tolerance policy toward alcohol leaves little, if any, room for interpretation or flexibility.

With few exceptions, students in most S.C. public schools who run afoul of rules banning alcohol, drugs — and especially weapons — are expelled automatically. Violent behavior and a history of insubordination also can be grounds for banishment.

Such strict policies evolved in response to adults' demands for a return to the discipline and decorum they remember from their childhood.

Today, however, some aspects of those policies have their share of critics, chief among them those who argue that zero tolerance affects the state's ability to produce high school graduates. It's time to rethink student punishment, some educators, attorneys and parents say.

District 5 trustees recently upheld the expulsion of Anderson's child and seven others for violating rules against possessing or consuming alcohol while on school grounds, the district's hearing officer said. All eight have the option of attending an alternative school, with the possibility of being allowed to enroll at Chapin High School in August, said Gregory McCord, the district's disciplinary hearing officer.

Most districts rely on alternative schools as a safety net in hopes a child in trouble will remain in school.

Nevertheless, some believe such policies exacerbate a South Carolina graduation rate that several surveys portray as the nation's worst. Data indicate one in two S.C. students fails to graduate from a public high school within four years.

"The utilization of zero tolerance as a disciplinary tool has grown scandalous," said Jay Elliott, a Columbia attorney specializing in family law. "Too many innocent kids are being forced out of school or unfairly punished."

Robert Schwartz directs the Juvenile Law Center, a nonprofit public interest law firm for children in Philadelphia that opposes zero tolerance policies.

"What we've seen is a rash of suspensions, expulsions and arrests for inadvertent, unintentional violations of school rules," Schwartz said. "That's where zero tolerance has run amok."

Anderson contends her daughter falls into that category.

“My child didn’t make a choice to break a school rule, and she’s receiving the maximum punishment for it,” Anderson said.

Those familiar with zero tolerance acknowledge there is little differentiation between mischief and calculated misbehavior.

“As educators and administrators, we have to take responsibility for navigating the gray areas,” said Lynne Noble, a Columbia College professor who trains future teachers.

“Zero tolerance is the easy way for not having to make tough decisions,” Noble said. “It’s one-size-fits-all. That’s not the way the world works.”

In his travels as state PTA president, Chuck Saylor hears few complaints about districts’ discipline policies.

“Most parents I talk with support zero tolerance,” said Saylor, who also is a Greenville County school trustee. “It sends a clear message, from border to border in this state, that we have high expectations in public schools with regard to behavior.”

“Is it a perfect system?” he said. “Probably not. At least it’s equal. The policy statewide allows for a safe and secure learning environment. We support that.”

‘EVERYBODY BUT MY CHILD’

Congress compelled public schools to get tough with students when it passed the “Gun-free Schools Act of 1994.” Schools were told to expel, for one year, any student who “brings a firearm or weapon to school” or risk losing federal aid.

In the 10 years since, discipline codes have evolved to include alcohol, drugs and disruptive behavior as reasons to jettison students for a first offense.

Dr. Bill Flemming, Richland 2’s school board chairman, said he believes constituents in his suburban Columbia district are satisfied with how the school district enforces rules.

“The community, as a whole, thinks it is a fair way,” Flemming said. “I believe it’s been accepted.”

Richland 2’s board of trustees will hear an appeal of an expulsion if a trustee requests the issue be placed on the board’s agenda. Flemming estimated the seven-member panel hears eight to 10 appeals each year.

“People believe in zero tolerance for ‘everybody but my child,’” Flemming said. “I think, however, they believe we are fair and have been fair. Our history has shown that.”

Vince Ford, a Richland 1 school trustee, has watched his district grapple with finding the right approach for dealing with serious discipline violations.

“Over the years, we have been concerned to be not too punitive on first offenses,” he said.

Ford said the pendulum of public opinion has swung back and forth with regard to

discipline and expulsions.

“Right now, I think there’s a feeling, at least in our district, of, ‘Let’s not have a death-penalty approach to every situation,’” Ford said.

In cases where alcohol is involved, Richland 1’s discipline officer has leeway in dealing with children, depending on their age. Those guilty of violations must attend counseling and an alternative school, but a third offense results in a one-year expulsion from the district.

A DETERRENT, OR NOT?

While school districts generally allow most students to attend an alternative school instead of putting them out on the street, the experience can be life-changing and traumatic.

District 5’s zero tolerance policy gave principal Jane Crawford no choice but to recommend all eight Chapin Middle students for expulsion. A hearing officer upheld the decision in the Anderson case, and the school board backed it in a 3-2 vote.

Carol Sloop, one of the two trustees disagreeing, said she would like to see the district find ways to keep children in their assigned school.

To be allowed to enroll at Chapin High next August, Anderson said her daughter must read two books, write a report, do 30 hours of community service, complete an alcohol counseling class and appeal for re-instatement before McCord, the hearing officer.

“They’re not in touch with reality,” Anderson said of district leaders.

Because student discipline records by law are private, District 5 officials said they could not comment on specific cases such as Anderson’s.

USC professor Lorin Anderson, who studies education trends, said the Chapin case underscores why zero tolerance is not a deterrent to bad behavior.

“If it were working, wouldn’t you see a decrease in the frequency of this kind of behavior over the past 10 years?” Anderson said. “I challenge people to come up with the evidence that would support that.”

Expulsion numbers — and expulsion trends — are difficult to pin down, state educators say, although the state Department of Education is working to rectify that.

To satisfy the federal No Child Left Behind law, states are collecting discipline statistics on suspensions, expulsions and truancy, according to J.C. Ballew of the state agency’s safe schools and youth services office.

In gathering the data, Ballew said he has found “zero tolerance gets applied in a number of circumstances. There are districts that have applied that to (the more minor and more common charge of) disrupting schools, for example.”

Zero tolerance critics think enough evidence exists after a decade to make changes.

“It really shouldn’t be too difficult to create a system of discretion which would enable administrators to tell the difference between a butter knife and a bazooka,” said Elliott, the Columbia lawyer.

The Juvenile Law Center's Schwartz said adults should keep something in mind: "Children respond well to punishment that is fair. We do a disservice to them and ourselves when our response is disproportionate to the offense."

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— Bill Robinson
The State
2005-03-28
<http://www.thestate.com/mld/thestate/11247212.htm>

From the Tallahassee Democrat:

Another "Doublespeak law" comes to 10 states. Florida is not the only state with a law like this on the table. Other states, among them Tennessee & Georgia, want to censure professors from professing views that students (and right wing government officials) do not want to hear. Like NCLB, 'Academic Freedom' means the lack of freedom to express views.

Academic Freedom Comes to Florida

By [Bill Cotterell](#)

Tallahassee Democrat | February 25, 2005

Watching Florida government and politics is like seeing an endless, ever-changing movie. Just when you think "this is where I came in," some entertaining little plot fillip keeps you riveted.

When I came to Tallahassee in 1969, efforts were made to forbid groups like Students for a Democratic Society to use meeting rooms or sponsor speakers at state-supported colleges. Some even singled out SDS by name. Others would have required students and professors to sign oaths attesting that they did not favor overthrowing the government by subversion or violence - and no fair choosing one or the other.

"I'm not a complete fascist, but I believe in a little repression," said Rep. Don Reed, a Boca Raton Republican who was among the best in a mostly ignorable GOP minority back then.

Reed was poking fun at more rabid colleagues during a committee hearing on one of the ill-fated bills. But his sarcasm didn't come through in print, so the university community responded with reflexive horror.

Across the Capitol, Sens. Bob Haverfield of Miami and William Dean (Wig) Barrow of Crestview also crusaded against campus commies. Jack Lieberman, an FSU student known as "Radical Jack," became the focus of legislative angst for teaching a course on "How to Make a Revolution" in the Center for Participant Education program.

Along about 1972, Barrow even accepted Lieberman's invitation to attend his class and debate war and capitalism. The senator was doing all right with the students, too, until he remarked, "Can we move this conversation out on the lawn? Some of y'all don't have the same bathing habits as me."

Well, what goes around, as they say, comes around.

Now the Republicans run the Legislature. And perceived threats to academic freedom come from the Left.

State Rep. Dennis Baxley, R-Ocala, has introduced an "[Academic Bill of Rights](#)" aimed at giving conservative students legal footing to challenge liberal bigotry. The bill (HB 837) doesn't mention left or right, but devotes more than half of its seven pages on "where as" statements that no one could disagree with.

It says, in effect, that universities should welcome free debate and inquiry, that people should not be denied hiring or tenure because of religious or political beliefs and that a student shouldn't fear a grade knockdown for wearing a Bush-Cheney cap to class.

"Some of us need to wake up and realize we're being asked to finance a culture war," said Baxley. "And we feel like we're financing the wrong side."

He said he got the idea of his bill from conservative commentator [David Horowitz](#), a recovered liberal who spends a lot of time on campuses - often being heckled and picketed by students and faculty members. Baxley said he has heard tales of conservative students or organizations being denied campus funds or facilities, tenure committees spurning instructors with strong religious beliefs and students being "assigned to write papers on why George W. Bush should be tried for war crimes."

"And I wasn't too delighted to have Michael Moore on campus to the tune of \$50,000 in student fees" in Gainesville, Baxley added.

Stan Marshall, who was president of FSU in the Radical Jack vs. Wig days, said Wednesday, "I don't think there's any question that the prevailing thought on most campuses is liberal and Democratic, but that doesn't bother me." What does bother him is intimidation or retaliation, "which I don't think is too prevalent - but if it happens to one student, that's one too many."

Baxley's bill wouldn't let you get a tuition refund if a feminist professor gave you a D because you oppose abortion, nor could students demand equal time for left and right guest speakers. They couldn't even herd the faculty Senate through the streets in dunce caps, like Maoists did in China's Cultural Revolution - perhaps making members read aloud the writings of Chairman Lynne Cheney from her tenure as head of the National Institute of the Humanities.

Such improvements are available through amendments, once the session starts.

Baxley's "Bill of Rights" reads more like a resolution than a law. The only action it requires is that a copy of the bill be sent to presidents of every university and community college in the state.

This bill addresses symptoms, not causes. Liberal bias in academia, like the leftward tilt of the media, is partly the right-wing's own fault. Conservatives quit the playing field 40 to 50 years ago, shamed by the excesses of Joe McCarthy, J. Edgar Hoover, and, in Florida, the infamous Charley Johns Committee.

So the Left didn't overtake campuses; it inherited them

And another article on the subject:

Capitol bill aims to control 'leftist' profs
THE LAW COULD LET STUDENTS SUE FOR UNTOLERATED BELIEFS.
By JAMES VANLANDINGHAM
Alligator Staff Writer
March 23, 2005

TALLAHASSEE - Republicans on the House Choice and Innovation Committee voted along party lines Tuesday to pass a bill that aims to stamp out "leftist totalitarianism" by "dictator professors" in the classrooms of Florida's universities.

The Academic Freedom Bill of Rights, sponsored by Rep. Dennis Baxley, R-Ocala, passed 8-to-2 despite strenuous objections from the only two Democrats on the committee.

The bill has two more committees to pass before it can be considered by the full House.

While promoting the bill Tuesday, Baxley said a university education should be more than "one biased view by the professor, who as a dictator controls the classroom," as part of "a misuse of their platform to indoctrinate the next generation with their own views."

The bill sets a statewide standard that students cannot be punished for professing beliefs with which their professors disagree. Professors would also be advised to teach alternative "serious academic theories" that may disagree with their personal views.

According to a legislative staff analysis of the bill, the law would give students who think their beliefs are not being respected legal standing to sue professors and universities.

Students who believe their professor is singling them out for "public

ridicule" - for instance, when professors use the Socratic method to force students to explain their theories in class - would also be given the right to sue.

"Some professors say, 'Evolution is a fact. I don't want to hear about Intelligent Design (a creationist theory), and if you don't like it, there's the door,'" Baxley said, citing one example when he thought a student should sue.

Rep. Dan Gelber, D-Miami Beach, warned of lawsuits from students enrolled in Holocaust history courses who believe the Holocaust never happened.

Similar suits could be filed by students who don't believe astronauts landed on the moon, who believe teaching birth control is a sin or even by Shands medical students who refuse to perform blood transfusions and believe prayer is the only way to heal the body, Gelber added.

"This is a horrible step," he said. "Universities will have to hire lawyers so our curricula can be decided by judges in courtrooms. Professors might have to pay court costs - even if they win - from their own pockets. This is not an innocent piece of legislation."

The staff analysis also warned the bill may shift responsibility for determining whether a student's freedom has been infringed from the faculty to the courts.

But Baxley brushed off Gelber's concerns. "Freedom is a dangerous thing, and you might be exposed to things you don't want to hear," he said. "Being a businessman, I found out you can be sued for anything. Besides, if students are being persecuted and ridiculed for their beliefs, I think they should be given standing to sue."

During the committee hearing, Baxley cast opposition to his bill as "leftists" struggling against "mainstream society."

"The critics ridicule me for daring to stand up for students and faculty," he said, adding that he was called a McCarthyist.

Baxley later said he had a list of students who were discriminated against

by professors, but refused to reveal names because he felt they would be persecuted.

Rep. Eleanor Sobel, D-Hollywood, argued universities and the state Board of Governors already have policies in place to protect academic freedom. Moreover, a state law outlining how professors are supposed to teach would encroach on the board's authority to manage state schools.

"The big hand of state government is going into the universities telling them how to teach," she said. "This bill is the antithesis of academic freedom."

But Baxley compared the state's universities to children, saying the legislature should not give them money without providing "guidance" to their

behavior.

"Professors are accountable for what they say or do," he said. "They're accountable to the rest of us in society. All of a sudden the faculty think they can do what they want and shut us out. Why is it so unheard of to say the professor shouldn't be a dictator and control that room as their totalitarian niche?"

In an interview before the meeting, Baxley said "arrogant, elitist academics are swarming" to oppose the bill, and media reports misrepresented his intentions.

"I expect to be out there on my own pretty far," he said. "I don't expect to be part of a team."

House Bill H-837 can be viewed online at www.flsenate.gov.

<http://www.alligator.org/pt2/050323freedom.php>

So much for Transcultural Triangularity. . .

A recent article in the Clarion Liar regarding Jackson Public Schools noted that the turnover hasn't affected test scores here. They have decided that all teachers will be on the same page every day. Can you imagine!

STUDENT TURNOVER HURTS TEST SCORES, CITY STUDY FINDS

Boston Globe -- March 26, 2005
by Tracy Jan

Nearly 1 in 5 Boston public school students moves in or out of a school during the school year, creating a revolving door of students who drag down test scores, a new school system study shows.

The study, the school district's first of student mobility and its link to performance, found that in the 2003-04 school year, 22 percent of high school students transferred in or out of a school; systemwide, the rate was 18 percent. The students who moved fared much worse in state exams; for example, on the MCAS English test, 65 percent of students who transferred passed, while 81 percent of the students who stayed passed.

With schools facing enormous pressure to improve students' state test scores, Boston school officials say they hope to find ways to boost achievement in schools with high student turnover. Since movement between schools is inevitable, officials say, they need to do a better job of helping children stay on track academically.

"Mobility can't be an excuse for poor performance," said Superintendent Thomas W. Payzant. "It doesn't matter if we have a child with us for three months, a year, two years. We have a responsibility."

Last school year, of the students who didn't transfer, the difference in students' performance on state exams was the starkest in math. In grades 3,4, 7 and 10, 62 percent of students who stayed in the same school passed, compared with 41 percent of those who transferred in midyear.

How the transfer rates of Boston's students stack up with those of students in other cities cannot be determined because school districts define mobility differently and the state Education Department doesn't track the rates, educators say.

Worcester, for example, estimated that 40 percent of its public high school students changed schools from October 2002 to October 2003, but it looked at students' enrollment patterns for a longer time span than Boston used.

Roberta Schaefer, a state Board of Education member, says she hopes Massachusetts soon begins collecting the data.

"We want to know whether the other urban districts are facing the same thing and whether anybody else had any solutions on how to deal with it," said Schaefer, director of the Worcester Regional Research Bureau, which conducted that city's study.

Teachers and principals say it's hard to make up weeks of missed classes with new students, who may have had a different curriculum at another school. With new names regularly added to the class roster, teachers must choose between repeating lessons or risk leaving new students behind.

At Charlestown High School, a new student from Hong Kong enrolled on

Monday, joining five other Chinese students who arrived this month. More than a quarter of that school's students move in and out of the school for a variety of reasons: from child custody changes to students who want different academic and extracurricular opportunities, said headmaster Michael Fung.

Charlestown High, whose boys' basketball team has just won its fifth state championship in six years, lost two students this year to East Boston High because the basketball players wanted a better shot at playing in games instead of sitting on the bench, Fung said. Like other Boston high schools with available seats, Charlestown also receives students who are expelled from neighborhood parochial schools in midyear, he said.

In Boston, nearly half of the students who leave school do so to attend charter, parochial, or other private schools or who move out of state, according to the school system study. Many others change schools within the system because they want a different academic program. And many more are simply poor and have to move around when they lose their housing, school officials said. Entering students are a mixture, including expelled students and dropouts returning to school.

At Charlestown High, many students who arrive in midyear are new immigrants from Asia who want to enroll in its bilingual Chinese program.

Ka Wei Wu, 20, the student from Hong Kong who enrolled Monday, was told about the Charlestown program by a Chinatown center for new immigrants. She struggled Thursday to keep up with classmates in her algebra class as they reviewed equations and factors for an upcoming test. Although she had already completed high school in Hong Kong, Wu said she enrolled at Charlestown High so she could learn English and have a shot at college.

Chen Chen, a 20-year-old student from China, entered Charlestown in January for the same reason. When he arrived, he only knew a few English phrases. Now, he's reading the children's book, "The Little Engine That Could."

He's getting 160 minutes of English instruction daily and tutoring twice a week after school. The school began doubling the amount of English instruction for all first- and second-year students to improve students' MCAS scores and help newcomers catch up.

Although new immigrants who arrive after Oct. 1 don't have to take the English MCAS their first spring at school, they must take the test the next year, said school officials, who acknowledge that their participation will probably bring down the school's English scores.

"You never know when the next one will arrive," said Wendy Lee, director of the school's English Language Learners program. "Maybe Monday when I come in, another two will show up."

The tumult affects not only the newcomer but also the learning of students who have been in the classroom from the beginning, said Richard Murnane, a professor at Harvard's Graduate School of Education who has researched student mobility in New Haven and Boston schools.

"You work hard to get kids to understand what they're supposed to do when they come in in the morning," Murnane said. "'A new kid comes in and it takes an awful lot of time to get kids to learn the routine, time that can't be spent with other children."

A few school systems in Massachusetts that have been reviewing student mobility longer than Boston are trying to help newcomers without disrupting current students' schooling.

To minimize the hurdles for transfer students, Worcester, elementary school teachers use identical approaches throughout the school system to cover the same material. Boston, as of last school year, had instituted the same math curriculum in all elementary schools, and has begun to make similar moves with history and science, for the same reason as Worcester.

In Holyoke, one of the state's poorest communities, at least 35 percent of the district's 7,300 students transfer in or out of a school each year, Superintendent Eduardo Carballo said.

To minimize classroom disruptions due to the steady stream of newcomers, Holyoke began a new program last fall for middle school students who arrive in midyear. In separate classrooms, the teachers help the newcomers catch up to their peers. The students don't enroll in their assigned school until the following quarter.

"We wanted to ease the impact on children coming in and out of a classroom like it's Grand Central Station," Carballo said.

The following article focuses on FL. But it appears that Pres Bush wants Congress to allocate economic and community development money based in part on NCLB scores.

Do you know anyone who works in a community action program?
It would be good for such people to know about this, if they do not yet.

REPORT: CITIES TO LOSE FUNDS IF EDUCATION RULES NOT MET
Associated Press -- March 28, 2005

Orlando -- Florida cities and counties stand to lose millions of federal grant dollars for community improvements if Gov. Jeb Bush and state education officials hold onto strict rules on schools to score well on math and reading standards, a newspaper reported Sunday.

President Bush has proposed to give a share of \$3.71 billion in federal economic assistance only to communities that can meet certain criteria, such as having schools that are making the academic progress required by his No Child Left Behind law.

Florida received \$189 million last year in federal community development block grants, but only two counties -- Leon and Wakulla -- and 23 percent of schools statewide met federal standards last year, the Orlando Sentinel reported Sunday.

If Congress adopts the president's grant proposal, school performance would be a factor used to determine what places would get money for economic and community development, said Sandy Baruah, an administrator

for the U.S. Commerce Department.

Florida communities have spent federal block grants on projects such as paving sidewalks and installing street lights in poorer areas, the newspaper reported.

Nonpartisan education experts agree that Florida's standards for success under federal law are among the toughest in the nation.

But Florida has the power to amend its standards and probably improve its performance -- states have until April 1 to submit revised standards to the U.S. Department of Education for them to be applied to student test scores for the current school year.

However, state Education Commissioner John L. Winn said Friday that the state intends to maintain its current rules.

Florida "is not asking the U.S. Department of Education to lower standards, but instead asking them to look at alternatives in their calculations such as including learning gains," Winn said in a statement.

Lelia Allen, Orlando's housing director, said linking the amount of grant money a community receives to its school performance doesn't make sense. After all, the work that money pays for, such as improving neighborhood safety, helps children do better in school, she said.

The federal law requires all students nationwide to be proficient in math and reading by 2014. Schools must show adequate yearly progress toward meeting this goal not only for students in general, but also for children grouped by income, race, ethnicity, disability and English fluency.

If just one group of students misses a performance target, then a school is classified as not making adequate progress.

This year, Florida's goal is 53 percent of students doing math at grade level and 48 percent of them reading at grade level, even for children with disabilities and those who do not speak English fluently.

Insane Too Mild a Term for High Stakes Testing in Mathematics

The inspiration for this piece is an article, "Math Emerges as Big Hurdle for Teenagers, H.S. Improvement Hinges on Critical Subject" by Debra Viadero, *Education Week*, published March 23, 2005. A few quotes from this article that follow illustrate the insanity of high stakes testing in math prevalent in the United States in 2005. The writer's comments about high stakes testing and requirements in math follow the quotes.

Researchers from the United Negro College Fund went to West Virginia last year and asked 62 high school dropouts in the federal Job Corps program a simple, open-ended question. "What was it about school," they wanted to know, "that caused you to quit?" With surprising consistency, a majority of the participants, most of whom were African-American or Hispanic, gave the same answer: "Math".

On the 2000 National Assessment of Educational Progress test in math, 17 percent of high school seniors scored at the “proficient” level—just under half the percentage scoring at that level on the NAEP reading test. Twenty-two percent of college freshmen are identified as needing remedial math, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

The challenge may be particularly daunting, these experts add, when it comes to the kinds of students drawn to training programs like the Job Corps—students who are members of minority groups or those who fall at the lower end of the academic-achievement scale. Yet, they note, the emphasis at the federal level so far has primarily been on improving reading. “I think, fundamentally, we’re going to find math is more critical than we might have thought it was,” said M. Christopher Brown II, the director of social justice and professional development for the American Educational Research Association, based in Washington.

Architects of the push for transforming high schools don’t disagree that the task they face is particularly great in math. But, they add, it’s not a reason to hold back on efforts to ratchet up academic content in high school math classes.

The “algebra for all” movement begun in the 1990s is a case in point, he said. Prompted by studies showing that algebra was a “gatekeeper” course that paved the way for students to take higher-level math and go on to college, many districts began requiring students to take a first-level algebra course by 8th or 9th grade.

The math wars and the bashing of American public education over test scores on standardized math tests are stupid and much ado about nothing. Algebra and higher math was of little value for most students 1955-57 and 1959-63, except as a college entrance requirement, when I taught math and chemistry at three excellent Wisconsin public high schools and is of little use for most students in the 21st Century. However, since some higher math is a general requirement for college and for subject areas in science and technical and engineering programs, all students who are ready and motivated to take higher math should take it in high school. The original purpose of requiring algebra and geometry for college entrance (not high school graduation) was to screen out students.

But taking algebra and higher math courses in high school is not enough anymore. Entrance tests in math are now required of entering college students, regardless of age and when they took required math courses. If they have not used mathematics, including algebra, geometry or even arithmetic operations like fractions etc. since taking them in high school many students may not pass these useless tests. These students will be required to relearn

math in remedial courses that they may not need in their selected major for no good reason. And their high school teachers will be labeled failures.

Public school bashers, including university math professors claim there is a crisis in math instruction in K-12 schools. I know personally older students who have extensive college credits returning to college who cannot pass entrance tests in math who waste time and money taking remedial math courses that are useless to them. However remedial math courses do provide income for the universities and faculty.

What is the rationale for higher-level math requirements for all? What is the rationale for high stakes testing for promotion or graduation and elimination of social promotion? When is the unintelligent testing and math mania going to end? When are political, educational and business leaders at the national and state level going to be held accountable for their educational polices?

Mathematics proficiency standardized testing is the most ridiculous feature of testing 3rd to 8th grade students nationwide. There is absolutely no rationale for establishing absolute high standards in math for students at any grade level. It is child abuse to label children who are arbitrarily labeled deficient in math skills at any grade level. It is destructive of children at any age level and does nothing but increase dropouts and decrease graduation rates.

I served on an advisory committee at the local high school on math and science instruction six years ago and I was amazed by the group discussion with teachers and administrators. It was almost as if “nothing” had changed in forty years. The same old clichés about the need to teach concepts and understanding of math and science and not just memorizing basic information were being said. The very same language I heard forty years ago. But the facts are that during the 50’s and 60’s when I was teaching math and science at the high school level there were many innovative methods of instruction for math and science introduced that attempted to do exactly what is being proposed as “new” in the 21st Century. The university elite was saying the same things about math and science in the 70’s, 80’s, and 90’s and now in the 2000s.

My experience is that teachers take what university professors say about teaching with a grain of salt. They try new things and use what is useable and discard what they believe is not of “significant” value. Teachers are increasingly “accountable” for results based on high standards, standardized tests and high stakes testing. Excellent teachers like those in the Milwaukee Public Schools with poor students from dysfunctional families and a large majority eligible for free and reduced lunch are bashed without mercy if their students “only” score in the 20th or 30th percentile on a standardized test. (Fifty percent of students on a test with norms are below average.) Teachers, as any rational person would, teach for the tests, if it is possible. But most often the tests, especially those with so-called proficiency levels, are not validated for content or anything else. What these tests indicate is that students have not memorized content they may have never been taught. So what!

In the case of math, advocates claim students have to be prepared for the

high skill jobs of the future and because students must be prepared to live in a “complex” modern high tech world in a global economy. The facts are that technology makes jobs simpler, a worker more productive and everyday tasks easier. A majority of jobs require only short-term or moderate length training. Where is the crisis? The United States has more college graduates than it needs for most jobs. Education is good for education’s sake. Only about 5% of jobs in the U.S. might require higher math skills.

See [210 Top 206 Job Titles for Employment in the United States in 2012](#)

The problems seem to never go away and there is a forever need for school reform to address the perceived problems and manufactured crisis in public education. New names are invented for tried and uneventful programs. School reforms are most often not harmful, as school bashers would claim they are just insignificant in meaningful results and are not cost effective. Most school reforms, including math curriculum reforms, over the last fifty years would fit this description. I cannot remember the names of the numerous curriculum reforms that have existed in my lifetime. Few if any have survived in total over the years. The good in them has been integrated into the curriculum and the rest discarded to be possibly renamed and tried again.

Another reason given for “all” students taking algebra, higher math and science is that it develops problem solving skills and critical thinking that are essential for modern life. Nonsense, as a chemist and teacher of math and an educational researcher for the last 35 years I have never observed or seen any valid evidence for this belief. Gerald Bracey, internationally known educational researcher, psychologist and writer in a 1992 Washington Post article “Cut Out Algebra “ said, “How about the argument that algebra and mathematics in general, makes for more logical, disciplined thinkers. In a pigs eye!” “Of course all of the studies psychologists have conducted to see if any disciple learned in algebra transfers to other situations have uniformly failed to find any transfer.”

Dennis W. Redovich retired as Director of Research, Planning and Development from the Milwaukee Area Technical College in 1991 after 28 years of service. He has taught chemistry and math at three Wisconsin high schools (Clinton, Wilmot and Whitefish Bay) and chemistry at MATC, UW-Milwaukee and Marquette University.

— Dennis W. Redovich
Center for the Study of Jobs and Education
2005-03-28
www.jobseducationwis.org

The wisdom of Marion Brady:

Amateurs Amok--Call in the Pros

"War is too important to be left to the generals."

So said Georges Clemenceau, twice prime minister of France in the early 20th century. Generals, he thought, were likely to be short on perspective, with imaginations hemmed in by military backgrounds, training and experience.

That possibility notwithstanding, it doesn't take too much digging into history or current events to know that ignoring professional military expertise isn't usually a good idea.

What Clemenceau should have said, then, is "War is too important to be left entirely to generals." Amateurs will sometimes be able to see a problem freshly, but when there's a battle to win, a heart to transplant, a bridge to build, an airliner to fly, deciding whether to go with an amateur or a professional is easy. When a job is difficult and important, we call on professionals.

Except in education. After the publication of *A Nation At Risk* in 1983, business leaders decided that education was too important to be left to professional educators. So they used their political clout not to help professional educators, but to shove them aside and take over.

The public went along. And goes along. Thoughtful people who'd consider it crazy if politicians told surgeons how to operate, engineers how to build bridges, or airline pilots how to fly, see nothing wrong with educational amateurs in Washington and state capitols running the education show. The nation's governors recently wrapped up this year's education-policy conference, issuing for the umpteenth time their standard education-reform formula: "Raise the bar, especially in math and science."

America is now deep into an amateur-engineered, single-strategy educational experiment. TEST! PASS! FAIL!

Many amateurs think this is a wonderful, long-overdue policy. Indeed, it seems to make so much sense that teachers who question it are likely to be viewed with suspicion. Good teachers, many believe (those deserving to be called professionals) constantly "raise the bar." Good teachers welcome being held accountable. Good teachers aren't overly concerned with students' self-concepts. Good teachers raise test scores.

Professionals know it isn't that simple. To cite a minor example of educational complexity: Professionals know that the areas of the brain that control mathematical thinking usually kick in earlier in boys than in girls -- sometimes as much as four years earlier. Girls eventually catch up, and after about age 12 there's no measurable difference in innate ability, but, in the meantime, there's that third- or fourth-grade standardized test the amateurs have put in place.

So what often happens? Little girls take the test. Then they (and their parents) jump to false conclusions about a lack of mathematical ability, conclusions that may follow them through school and life, forever affecting performance and school and career choices.

An amateur-mandated, high-stakes, standardized test -- a test that ignores male-

female differences -- turns what the professional knows is a non-problem into a potentially serious problem.

That kind of thing happens all the time. Amateurs think there's a "standard" level of reading for 9-year-olds. Professionals know better. Amateurs think that kids who can't read "at grade level" can't learn anything else. Professionals know better. Amateurs think test-makers know how to write culture-neutral tests that precisely measure skills and abilities. Professionals know better. Amateurs think hanging negative labels on kids and schools doesn't seriously affect performance. Professionals know better.

Why do the amateur educators in the Business Roundtable and Congress enjoy more respect and influence than professional educators? There's a slew of possible sociological explanations, but a simple one is important. As in everything else, the less known about something, the simpler it seems to be. What separates amateurs and professionals is ignorance of complexity, and when it comes to complexities, every kid in every classroom is a walking bundle of them.

Take the matter of grade retention. Professionals know that "grade level" is an invented, arbitrary idea left over from the school-as-factory era, know that academic gains from grade retention are almost always temporary, know that kids mature at different rates, know that individual differences are America's greatest intellectual asset, know grade repeaters rarely graduate, know we've created no alternative career paths for "non-standard" kids, know that helping helps a lot more when kids don't think they're stupid. And they know this just begins the list of complex issues being ignored by grade-retention legislation.

If the fog of political rhetoric ever lifts and the true state of education in America becomes clear, don't blame the professionals for the chaos. Their opinions have been ignored for years.

Marion Brady, a longtime educator, lives in Cocoa. He can be reached at mbrady22@cfl.rr.com. He wrote this commentary for the Orlando Sentinel.

— Marion Brady
Orlando Sentinel
2005-03-27
<http://tinyurl.com/3lofo>

Here is the Future of Education. From Florida:

Tests or No Tests?

Florida, which hands out more school tuition vouchers than any other state in the nation, is looking this fall to add more. This time, children who score badly on state reading tests would be given money to go to a private school under the presumption they would do better. But the "Reading Compact Scholarship" offers no assurances. In fact, a child could be sent from a public school the state deems academically excellent to a private school whose academic record is a secret.

This educational hypocrisy underlies Florida's rapid expansion of school privatization. Six years and some \$440-million after plunging into vouchers, the state has yet to resolve a structural contradiction. Under the sweeping A+reform laws, the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test is the No. 1 measure of success and failure for public schools. Yet most of the voucher schools refuse to use the FCAT.

So no one really knows whether vouchers are working.

"If we're pulling students out of a . . . public school and putting them into a private school, then where is the validation that they're doing better?" asks state Sen. Jim King, R-Jacksonville, a consistent supporter of vouchers. "Just the fact that we moved them doesn't mean they're doing okay. My thing is this: If we spend state dollars, then we have an obligation to make sure the dollars are well spent. To think that we shouldn't do that is simply nonsense."

The reading voucher, which is winding its way through the Legislature, is only one illustration of King's point. The House version says a public school student who scores at Level I on the FCAT reading test for two out of three years should be offered a voucher. (Nearly 350,000 students currently fall into that category.) But the House bill offers only the possibility that a different standardized test might be required and its results viewed by a private research group. Private school lobbyists argue the FCAT is based on a public school curriculum and shouldn't be required in private schools, as though reading is somehow a specialized skill.

The reading voucher would be the state's sixth new voucher program in six years, and it has come a long way from the 52 students who were awarded vouchers in 1999 because their two Panhandle schools were judged to be failing.

By conservative estimates, Florida could send \$350-million to private schools next year alone. The voucher enrollment could reach 113,000 students, roughly the size of the Pinellas school district. Even removing prekindergarten students from the mix, the voucher enrollment would be larger than 46 of the state's 67 districts.

Yet virtually none of the state's normal educational standards apply.

In most voucher schools, the teachers don't need to be certified, the schools don't need to be accredited, the operators don't have to be screened for possible criminal backgrounds, the students don't have to take the FCAT and they don't have to be held back or denied a diploma because of their performance on any standardized test.

The lack of standards is only part of the problem. The oversight provided by the state Department of Education has been a disaster, leading to at least five administrative and criminal investigations. Here is only a sample of what they have found:

- * Parents who were prompted to sign powers of attorney at a Panhandle school, which, according to criminal investigators, then signed \$146,268 worth of checks for students who no longer attended.
- * A Tampa Islamic school that was receiving corporate tax vouchers at a time when the FBI claimed it was a base for terrorism.
- * A Boynton Beach group that took vouchers for disabled students who were being taught in their own homes.
- * An Ocala businessman in bankruptcy and with a history of racketeering charges who was handed \$268,000 in voucher money that he never gave to children.
- * Two schools in Seminole and Orange counties that had their charters revoked by school boards because of uncertified teachers and declining test scores, only to reopen as private schools supported by state vouchers.

* Students receiving more than one voucher because the state wasn't comparing lists from the separate programs.

DOE just appointed its eighth voucher administrator in four years, and lawmakers have grown so weary of the department's embarrassments they turned over the new pre-K program to the Agency for Workforce Innovation.

For those keeping score, the state could soon be running six different voucher programs with three different types of oversight and six different forms of payment. The Opportunity Scholarship, the oldest and smallest program, is offered to students whose schools are deemed to be failing because of low FCAT scores. McKay Scholarships are available to any disabled student. Corporate Income Tax scholarships are for economically disadvantaged students. Virtual school vouchers are for students in kindergarten through eighth grade who are willing to learn at home through a computer. Pre-K vouchers will be available this fall to any 4-year-old. The reading voucher is still in bill form.

The McKay is the most lucrative for entrepreneurs, offering as much as \$20,000 per student, depending on the disability. The Corporate Tax voucher offers only \$3,500 per student, a sum that stands in curious contrast to the online voucher, which is run with no buildings and few teachers, at a cost of \$4,800 per student. Four of the vouchers are overseen by DOE, but the money poured into the Corporate Tax vouchers goes directly to private organizations. Pre-K will be handled through the state's workforce network.

The Opportunity Scholarship is the only one based on the theory that a public school is performing badly.

"I think the only reason there hasn't been more of a blending, moving toward some symmetry, has to do with the litigation on the first (voucher program)," says Patrick Heffernan, president of Floridians for School Choice. "Once the litigation runs its course, I think we can begin to deal with the piecemeal approach."

The litigation, now before the Florida Supreme Court, questions whether the state can spend tax money to send students to religious schools. But the constitutional issue bears little relation to the political battle over accountability. One reason the state has failed to bring true oversight and organization to this exploding privatization effort is that critics have been branded as enemies. The two voucher plans that do require FCAT testing are by far the smallest, and private school operators who want no testing and few standards are a potent political force.

Florida is also becoming a haven for national voucher groups. This last election, a group called All Children Matter pumped \$1.6-million - all of it from out of state - into the campaigns of legislative candidates who support vouchers.

As the voucher world has expanded, though, the calls for accountability are coming not just from public school competitors. Some of those who operate respected and credentialed private schools don't want to be lumped in with those who chase government dollars. The Florida Catholic Conference has repeatedly voiced concerns, and even hinted that its schools might not participate in the pre-K vouchers this fall if the state doesn't impose real standards.

"In early '99, when the A plus Plan was debated, there was a sense that many private schools could provide a better education," Larry Keough, education associate for the Catholic Conference, said last year. "Now we're at a different place. What we have found is that there have been many dubious types of schools created for the express purpose of drawing down state dollars. As a result, not all the children are being well

served."

Legislation to bring financial accountability was blocked in the House last year, and Gov. Jeb Bush and the House are resisting a more comprehensive reform proposed by King this year in the Senate. Bush's education board chairman, Phil Handy, has likened the failings in oversight to "hiccups," and the governor himself has been almost flippant about the lack of checks and balances. In announcing his reading voucher plan, Bush told reporters: "I think it's frankly as American as apple pie to give people choices when what's provided them isn't working."

For better or worse, the governor relies on the FCAT to tell him that "what's provided them isn't working" in public schools. But he has no way to tell whether most of the students on vouchers are succeeding. He and education commissioner John Winn often claim success, but they are generally referring to enrollment increases. One voucher advocacy group, the Manhattan Institute, released a report in 2003 that described McKay voucher schools as "superior" based solely on a survey of parents. Without test results, it had no other source of information.

"My biggest problem with vouchers is that there is not a standard accountability measure," says Wayne Blanton, executive director for the Florida School Boards Association. "Quite frankly, there are some very good public schools and some very good private schools. But until we compare apples to apples, we don't know which ones are doing a good job and which aren't."

As Florida ratchets up the number of private schools getting public money, the excuses are sounding more and more strained. After all, in the Bush view of education, standardized testing is the essential tool to verify whether students are learning. The governor has repeatedly denounced those who claim the FCAT is used in onerous and punitive ways, and President Bush has beaten the same drum in the nation's capital. Just last month, when asked about testing requirements under the federal No Child Left Behind Act, President Bush said: "I've heard every excuse in the book not to test. My answer is, how do you know if a child is learning if you don't test?"

The president's question is one his brother has yet to answer. If the FCAT is to be the engine that drives Florida's education system, how does the governor excuse any school that refuses to use it? That's the Florida voucher conundrum.

Jon East is an editorial writer with the St. Petersburg Times. He can be reached at east@sptimes.com or 727-893-8667.

— Jon East
St. Petersburg Times
2005-03-27

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[I posted the Sacramento Bee's coverage of this issue earlier.](#)

Confronting the Graduation Rate Crisis in California
download the report at:
<http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu/research/dropouts/dropouts05.php#reports>

Executive Summary

Every year, across the country, a dangerously high percentage of students-disproportionately poor and minority-disappear from the educational pipeline before graduating from high school. Nationally, only about 68% of all students who enter 9th grade will graduate "on time" with regular diplomas in 12th grade. While the graduation rate for white students is 75%, only approximately half of Black, Latino, and Native American students earn regular diplomas alongside their classmates. Graduation rates are even lower for Black, Latino and Native American males. Yet, because of misleading and inaccurate reporting of dropout and graduation rates, the public remains largely unaware of this educational and civil rights crisis.

This crisis may be even less apparent in California because, officially, the state reports a robust overall graduation rate of 86.9%. However, this rate is based upon a flawed National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) formula that dramatically underestimates the actual numbers of dropouts. When the more accurate Cumulative Promotion Index (CPI-see next section) is used, the overall graduation rate is 71% for 2002, which is slightly above the national average. In fact, according to a recent study released by ETS, California is one of only seven states in the country where the overall graduation rate has improved from 1992 to 2002 (from 64% to 71%).

Nonetheless, graduation rates in individual districts and schools-particularly those with high minority concentrations-remain at crisis level proportions. Only 64% of all students in central city districts graduate with regular diplomas. In racially segregated districts, only 65% of all students graduate, and only 58% graduate in socio-economically segregated districts. According to Professor Robert Balfanz of Johns Hopkins University, Black and Latino students are 3 times more likely than White students to attend a high school where graduation is not the norm and where less than 60% of ninth graders obtain diplomas four years later. Another independent study by Dr. Julie Mendoza of the University of California All Campus Consortium on Research for Diversity

(UC/ACCORD) finds that in the state's largest district, Los Angeles, only 48% of Black and Latino students who start 9th grade complete grade 12 four years later. The exodus of Los Angeles youth from school is especially pronounced between grades 9 and 10, which means that they are leaving school ill prepared for all but the most menial jobs. And, even among the Black and Latino youth who complete high school in Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), only one in five have met the curriculum requirements to qualify for admission to a four year public university in California.

California's failure to graduate so many of its students is a tragic story of wasted human potential and tremendous economic loss. When high numbers of youth leave school ill-prepared to contribute to our labor force and to civic life, our economy and our democracy suffer. Life opportunities for these youth and for their offspring are dramatically curtailed. According to Russell Rumberger, Professor at the University of California at Santa Barbara, the 66,657 students who were reported as dropouts from the California public schools in the 2002-03 will cost the state \$14 billion in lost wages. These costs rise significantly when one considers that the actual number of students who leave school without diplomas is much higher than the estimates provided by the state. Since the greatest economic benefits of earning a high school diploma as are realized in the next generation, the most significant loss is to their-and our- future.

Press Release

New Research Exposes Hidden High School Drop Out Crisis; Acute Among California's African-American And Latino Students

Los Angeles, Oakland Districts Graduate Less than Half of Incoming Freshmen; Some Schools Beating the Odds and Graduating High Percentage of Low Income, African-American and Latino Students

Economic Implications and Solutions to Dropout Crisis to be Discussed at LA Conference: "Dropouts in California: Confronting the Graduation Rate Crisis"

(Los Angeles) - A previously hidden crisis of high school dropouts in California was revealed today by researchers convening for The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University's conference "Dropouts in California: Confronting the Graduation Rate Crisis." The shocking new data reveal that

high school graduation rates in California are much worse than reported by the state, and are alarmingly low for African-American and Latino students.

According to research to be presented at the March 24 conference, California's overall graduation rate is approximately 71 percent--16 percentage points lower than the official rate of 87 percent. The graduation rates for African-American and Latino students are even lower, 60 percent for Latino students and 56.6 percent for African-Americans.

"Large urban school districts in California have become 'dropout factories,'" said Gary Orfield, Director of the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University and author of the new book *Dropouts In America: Confronting the Graduation Rate Crisis*. The economic and social impacts of this dropout crisis are too enormous for Californians to ignore. The State must make schools accountable for graduating their students and provide resources to help students whose careers would be wrecked by leaving school."

New research by the Urban Institute showed that California's largest school districts have some of the worst on-time graduation rates. Specifically:

- Los Angeles and Oakland Unified School Districts graduate less than half of their incoming freshmen on time.

- Six of the state's largest ten school districts graduate less than half of their Latino students: Los Angeles, San Diego, Fresno, Oakland, Sacramento City and San Bernardino City.

The state loses billions of dollars in revenue each year because high school dropouts are ill prepared to join the work force, leading to higher unemployment and underemployment rates. Professor Russell Rumberger of U.C. Santa Barbara calculated that just one year of high school dropouts costs the state \$14 billion in lost wages.

Nevertheless, a new analysis by Professor Robert Balfanz at Johns Hopkins University shows that some schools are beating the odds and graduating a high percentage of their students. Balfanz found 15 schools with a high number of low income African-American and Latino students that are graduating more than 90 percent of their students. The top ten are: Polytechnic High - Long Beach, Calexico High-Calexico Unified, Alhambra High-Alhambra City High, Northview High-Covina Valley Unified, and Gabriella High-San Gabriel Unified, 32nd Street USC Performing Arts-LA Unified, Holtville High-Holtville Unified, Bassett Sr. High-Bassett Unified, Southwest Sr. High-Sweetwater Union High, Jordan High-Long

Beach.

"California's poor graduation rates can and must be improved," said Anne Stanton, Director of the Youth Program at the James Irvine Foundation which provided funding for the conference. "Youth at risk of dropping out have enormous potential to be engaged, earn a diploma and become productive citizens."

Solutions to be discussed at the conference include: funding and implementing the unique student identifier system that was passed by the California legislature, new legislation that would require more accurate statewide reporting and greater accountability for improving graduation rates, forming new coalitions to advocate for improvements at the district and state level, and implementing proven interventions designed to reduce California's dropout rates. "If properly implemented, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) could be used to improve graduation rates," said Daniel Losen, Senior Education Law and Policy Associate at The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University. "The first step is to stop allowing states to report inaccurate graduation rates using flawed methodology. The second is to use NCLB to ensure that districts meet or make yearly progress towards a reasonable graduation rate goal for all students."

Other research findings include:

* California actually graduated an estimated 71percent of its high school students in 2002. Estimated graduation rates for minority students for that year were substantially lower: 57 percent for African-Americans, 60 percent for Latinos, and 52 percent for Native Americans. In contrast, white students graduated at a rate of 78 percent.

* In California, African-American and Latino students are 3 times more likely than white students to attend a high school where graduation is not the norm (i.e. attrition of 40 percent or more). Overall 32 percent of African-American and 31 percent of Latino students in California attend one of these high schools compared to only 8 percent of white students.

* In the Los Angeles Unified School District-the state's largest district-only 48 percent of African-American and Latino students who start 9th grade graduate four years later.

* Current educational policies, such as high stakes tests for students

and test-driven accountability for schools, appear to create unintended incentives for school officials to push out low achieving students.

* The most accurate method for tracking high school graduation rates would be to provide each student with a single lifetime school identification number that would follow him/her throughout his/her entire school career.

CO-SPONSORS: The conference is co-sponsored by The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, (CRP), the American Civil Liberties Union, (ACLU), Californians for Justice, Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF), Public Advocates, Inc., the University of California All Campus Consortium On Research for Diversity (UC/ACCORD), Justice Matters Institute, and Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE). It is supported by a grant from The James Irvine Foundation.

About The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University

The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University (CRP), founded in 1996, is a leading, national organization devoted to research and policy analysis about critical civil rights issues facing the nation. Its mission is to bridge the worlds of ideas and action by becoming a preeminent source of intellectual capital and a forum for building consensus within the civil rights movement. We achieve this by interweaving strategies of research and policy analysis, and by building strong collaborations between researchers, community organizations, lawyers and policy makers. Our dual objectives are to: (1) raise the visibility of, and attention to, racial justice national policy debates; and (2) arm local and national civil rights and educational organizations with credible research to inform their legal, political and public education efforts.

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Important note!

Standard & Poors (a division of McGraw-Hill, a firm which also manufactures K-12 exams and test-prep material) has launched a new website which includes a variety of indicators of educational achievement (largely test scores) and school financing. The project was done in collaboration with the Council of Chief State School Officers.

Check it out at: <http://www.schoolmatters.com>

and be prepared for politicians and journalists to begin drawing on it.

CATCHING UP WITHOUT LETTING GO

Christian Science Monitor -- March 29, 2005
by Stacy A. Teicher

What spells "success" for native American students? Certainly one answer would be improvement in their reading and math scores, which lag significantly behind those of their white peers. But many educators also seek to give native students a solid grounding in their unique cultural traditions and history. And some worry that this is a goal that will lose out as an unintended consequence of the 2001 federal education law known as No Child Left Behind.

Native Americans fought hard to regain a say over their own education in the civil rights movement of the 1960s and '70s. But now that school staff members need higher-education credentials, what will happen to native-language classes taught by community elders? If schools are sanctioned for not meeting attendance goals, but not offered funding to cut down on truancy, how will they avoid coming under state control?

"Whoever designed [NCLB] wasn't thinking anything about the history of Indian education," says one of the law's critics, Denis Viri, a research associate at Arizona State University's Center for Indian Education. "We feel an effective education is one that's defined primarily by the goals of the community. But [education in the US] is still a strongly assimilative system ... and in my opinion, No Child Left Behind is just another one of those roadblocks."

The history is complex, but perhaps the most relevant chapter started in the 1880s, when Indian children were forced into boarding schools and punished if caught speaking their native languages. The early 1900s saw an easing of such policies, but after World War II, when Navajo code

talkers helped defend against the Japanese, policies slid back toward English instruction.

A series of reports on the low quality of education for Indian students was finally followed up by new laws, including the 1975 Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act.

State by state, curricula are slowly starting to include more native American history. In addition, about three dozen schools in the US use an indigenous language for all instruction.

Many of those schools are private, but some public schools primarily serving Indian students - including about 30 charters - have been weaving in native approaches to learning.

One example is Fort Hall Elementary school on the Shoshone-Bannock Indian Reservation in Idaho. As the school made more connections with families and introduced native culture and language, attendance increased from 68 percent to 97 percent, the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory reports.

In Washington State, young Indian students are devouring a series of stories that were written to reflect native culture. The education department created the curriculum in partnership with tribal elders and authors, and is distributing lesson plans through a CD-ROM, complete with video clips of tribe members teaching everything from the significance of the canoe to traditional songs and drumming.

"It's telling the true story of who we are, not what you see in John Wayne movies," says Denny Hurtado, a member of the Skokomish tribe and Washington's program supervisor for Indian education. "The elders told us they wished this stuff was here when they went to school." In recent years, he says, Indian students have made more gains in reading than other groups, and teachers tell him this curriculum is part of the reason.

Not everyone believes that infusing schools with native culture is necessary for success.

Ben Chavis took over as principal of American Indian Public Charter School in Oakland, Calif., four years ago, when it was on the verge of failure. The school attracts many native Americans, but also includes a typical urban racial blend.

"No Child Left Behind is the greatest educational reform that we've ever had in America, because we hold people accountable," says Mr. Chavis, himself a native American. "That's what I do. I'm into reading and

writing and math and science and history. Blacks, Mexicans, Indians, and poor whites don't need more culture - they need some academics to get into Harvard or Berkeley or Stanford."

Chavis discontinued a morning drum circle, where children and staff would discuss their feelings, he says. That made room for a daily block of intensive language-arts instruction. He also uses creative methods to ensure high attendance - including showing up at absent students' homes, and giving cash bonuses to teachers and students with perfect attendance.

Last year, theirs was the only Oakland school for middle or high school grades to score above 800 on California's 1,000-point Academic Performance Index. By hiring good teachers (and paying them more than he pays himself), Chavis says he's given students what they need to earn good grades. "We've made it popular among Indians to be smart," he says.

Most proponents of culturally based education don't argue against the need to improve English and other skills measured by standardized tests. Rather, they point to research that suggests there's a link between these goals.

A new study of language-immersion and culture programs in Hawaii, Montana, Alaska, and Arizona is being developed by William Demmert, a longtime scholar of native American education and a professor at Western Washington University. "Our hypothesis is that students who learn more than one language are enhanced intellectually and cognitively, and by the time they reach 12th grade, they will do as well or better than [single-language] students," says Mr. Demmert, also one of the authors of the 1991 report of the Indian Nations at Risk Task Force.

About 80 percent of the achievement gap between minorities and whites is thought to be tied to poverty, Demmert says. He hopes that for native Americans, much if not all of the other 20 percent can be eliminated through the language and culture approach. "It deals with self-image and identity and motivation, and [gives] a sense of historical perspective that is important for colonized people to know and recognize."

Native Americans are more likely to attend schools that are subject to sanctions under NCLB, says Gail Sunderman, principal investigator for a study by Harvard University's Civil Rights Project. "There's not a lot of basis in research that those sanctions will improve things."

Students are supposed to be able to transfer out of schools that aren't doing well enough, for instance, but in many Indian areas there are no nearby alternatives. Other schools have to start special tutoring programs, even if the problem is absences rather than test scores.

The Blackwater Community School on the Gila River Indian Reservation in Arizona didn't make adequate progress last year because it fell short of the state attendance requirement of 94 percent. The small school had a 92 percent rate, and "that's high for Indian country," says principal Jacquelyn Power.

Blackwater also draws teachers' aides and other staff from the community, but new regulations require more education for the staff. "We don't disagree ... but it's just making it difficult to recruit from the local population," she says.

That, in turn, can make it difficult for schools to fulfill a community-based mission. "The whole issue of who controls education is a huge one, not just for native Americans," Sunderman says. "The federal government is really taking a lot of control in this."

But Victoria Vasques is confident that schools can comply with NCLB without threatening native Americans' self-determination. As director of the Office of Indian Education at the US Department of Education, she says she's more proud now than she's ever been in her three-decade career.

Students who once would be left out when schools reported test scores, or shunted off into classes with lower standards, are now getting intensive help, she says. "I saw first-hand growing up, Indian kids who didn't have a true disability [were placed in special ed]. They were just slower, or they had a language issue, or they didn't have someone to read to them [at home].... I can tell you, you see a difference now."

Ms. Vasques has been meeting with tribal representatives and Indian education organizations, and they will all be part of a national conference on NCLB April 6-7 in New Mexico. That's one step outlined in Executive Order 13336, signed last spring by President Bush. It sets up a working group to "assist American Indian and Alaska Native students in meeting the challenging student academic standards ... in a manner that is consistent with tribal traditions, languages, and cultures."

"We recognize that we have challenges in Indian country and in rural communities," Vasques says. "We recognize that there are language-immersion programs that have been proven to work. So it's key that we all work together to ... start making sure that we're closing the achievement gap for our Indian kids."

<http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/0329/p11s01-legn.html>

Sad news:

STUDENTS WHO BALK AT CSAP HELD BACK

Denver Post -- March 30, 2005

by Karen Rouse

Aurora teacher Frank Maes was so fed up with CSAP tests that he decided to take a personal stand.

He told the Bennett School District last month that his sixth-grade daughter, Nicole, would not participate in the Colorado Student Assessment Program.

"All it does is label schools and kids," said Maes, a math teacher at South Middle School.

Pressure from administrators has reduced kids to test scores, Maes said. "They don't have names anymore. We talk about these kids in terms of proficiency."

But district officials told him that if Nicole didn't take the tests, she would not move on to the seventh grade next year.

Under Bennett's year-old policy, Maes learned, students who refuse to take the CSAP are automatically held back a grade.

Maes withdrew his request two weeks ago rather than risk seeing his daughter repeat a grade. She took the CSAP.

The school board adopted the policy last spring to prevent students from bailing out of the state exam, Superintendent George Sauter said.

But parents and education officials around the state say they have never heard of such a severe penalty.

"I can't imagine as a school district there is a board that would support that," said Roscoe Davidson, deputy education commissioner.

Sauter argues that in a tiny district such as Bennett, with only about 1,000 students on the eastern fringe of metro Denver, low CSAP participation can harm academic ratings.

"We want to get people's attention that this is important," Sauter said.

Students in grades three through 10 take tests in reading, writing, math and science. When students refuse to take the test, their district's rating is brought down, which could lead to a loss of federal dollars.

"This is obviously a high- stakes test," Sauter said. "For students not to take it, it does affect us adversely."

State law does not offer an "opt-out" for CSAP. Rather, it says: "Every student enrolled in a public school shall be required to take the assessments."

That hasn't stopped parents from pulling their kids.

Last year, more than 3,200 students did not take the CSAP because of parent refusal, according to the Colorado Department of Education website.

At Crawford Elementary in the Aurora Public School District, 66 students boycotted the CSAP this month to protest the district's decision to end a dual- language program.

Colorado Springs parent Christina Elmore has given her fourth-grade son and ninth- grade daughter the option of skipping the CSAP tests since 2000. Both have chosen not to participate.

Elmore said she became concerned about the test when her daughter was in the fourth grade.

"I asked her teacher how she was doing in class," Elmore recalled. "She said, 'I don't have time to see how these children are doing individually ... because I'm spending all my time in testing.'"

Dave Chandler, the parent of a fifth-grader at Thomson Elementary School in Arvada, for the first time told administrators not to test his daughter this year.

He said he became frustrated while serving on the school's accountability committee and witnessing how much time was spent discussing how to boost CSAP scores.

Chandler said his daughter was scheduled for two hours of CSAP testing over nine days. "Why can't they use one day of testing to find out if the kids are really learning?" he said.

In the Bennett district, Maes says he feels robbed of his right to decide what his child can be exposed to in school. Parents can pull a child from sex-education class but not CSAP, he said.

Tim Babbidge of the Coalition for Better Education, an anti-CSAP group, questions the legality of the district's policy of holding students back

if they refuse to take the test.

"It seems to be denying a parent a very basic right of controlling their (child's) education," Babbidge said.

Lauren Kingsbery, legal counsel for the Colorado Association of School Boards, said there is no statute that governs student promotion or retention.

"Every (Colorado) district essentially determines its own promotion policy," she said.

"Until it's challenged in court and some judge would weigh whether the interests of the district outweigh the interest of the family, we really can't say" whether it's illegal, she said.

School administrators statewide acknowledge they cannot force students to participate in CSAP. Many resort to holding pep rallies, parties or even parking-space raffles to reward students who show up for testing.

A policy adopted by Douglas County's school board in 1999 could provide added incentive.

Starting with the class of 2005, students must show proficiency in reading to graduate, said Nancee Sprigg, director of assessment for the district.

The easiest way to meet that requirement is for students to score as proficient or higher on the 10th-grade reading CSAP, Sprig said.

Bennett's policy - which grew out of frustration the district's high school principal felt three years ago when more than a dozen students refused to take the test - allows the district to retain a student only once.

"If you're going to enroll your kid in the Bennett School District, you know they're going to be taking the CSAP," Sauter said.

No Child Left Behind - The Basketball Version

This one's for Shante.

1. All teams must advance to the Sweet 16, and all will win the championship. If a team does not win the championship, they will be on probation until they are the champions, and coaches will be held accountable.

2. All kids will be expected to have the same basketball skills at the same time and in the same conditions. No exceptions will be made for interest in basketball, a desire to perform athletically, or genetic abilities or disabilities. ALL KIDS WILL PLAY BASKETBALL AT A PROFICIENT LEVEL.

3. Talented players will be asked to practice on their own, without instruction. This is because the coaches will be using all their instructional time with the athletes who aren't interested in basketball, have limited athletic ability or whose parents don't like basketball.

4. Games will be played year round, but statistics will only be kept in the 4th, 8th and 11th games.

5. This will create a New Age of sports where every school is expected to have the same level of talent and all teams will reach the same minimal goals. If no child gets ahead, then no child will be left behind.
