

Wasting Education Dollars: The Women's Educational Equity Act

By Krista Kafer



Krista Kafer

AS Congress and the Administration continue to work on the rules, regulations, and appropriations of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), improving the academic performance of economically disadvantaged children should be a

top priority. These children continue to fall behind their more advantaged peers on standardized tests in every academic subject.

The scattershot approach of the previous Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), with its sixty-one narrowly tailored and uncoordinated programs, was largely unsuccessful in closing the gap between poor students and their more affluent peers. Reauthorization of duplicative and ineffective programs all but guarantees that funds will continue to be diverted from the most pressing issues. Of the programs of this sort that have been reauthorized, perhaps the most troubling is the Women's Educational Equity Act (WEEA), the justification for which has repeatedly been refuted by both statistical evidence and practical experience.

The facts belie the assumption of gender inequity—the rationale for the Women's Educational Equity Act. Nevertheless, Congress voted to reauthorize WEEA this year.

The Program is Unnecessary

The Women's Educational Equity Act was enacted twenty-seven years ago to promote "equity" in educational policies, programs, activities, and initiatives. It was based on the premise that "teaching and learning practices in the United States are frequently inequitable as such practices relate to women and girls." All told, programs created under this act have cost taxpayers roughly \$100 million. Yet, according to the U.S. General Accounting Office, there have been no evaluations of WEEA projects, and thus "little evidence of their effectiveness in eliminating sex bias in education."

There is evidence, however, that the problem that WEEA programs were created to address may not even exist. Two years ago, the U.S.

Department of Education released a congressionally mandated study, *Trends in Educational Equity of Girls and Women*. On the basis of an analysis of forty-four indicators—including academic achievement and behavioral outcomes—researchers concluded that "By most of these measures, females are doing at least as well as males." This past year, the Educational Testing Service came to a similar conclusion in a report on *Differences in the Gender Gap*:

Females have made dramatic progress in educational attainment, across all racial/ethnic groups, pulling even with (and in some cases, surpassing) males....

There is neither a pattern of across-the-board male advantage nor a pattern of across-the-board female advantage....

In fact, according to the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Education, Research, and Improvement, with regard to most academic measures, girls equal or outperform boys, and their success continues into adulthood. The gender gap in language tests, drop-out rates, Advanced Placement participation, honors courses, and other indicators favors girls. The gender gap favoring girls in reading and writing is three times as large as the gap favoring boys in science and math.

As a number of studies have demonstrated, teaching and learning practices in the United States are not inequitable in their effect on women and girls. Girls do well academically. They are more successful in language courses, are more involved in school activities, have higher rates of graduation at both high school and college levels, and are less likely to participate in high-risk behavior. In fact, if anything, recent studies should raise concerns about boys. Specifically, the research indicates that:

Girls outscore boys in reading.

On the 1999 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) long-term trend reading assessment, girls outperformed boys on average scores in all three age groups (nine, thir-

teen, and seventeen years). By age seventeen, the reading gap favors girls by fourteen points.

Girls outscore boys in writing.

On the 1998 NAEP Writing Report Card for the Nation, girls had higher average scores than males at all three grade levels tested. In fact, twice as many girls scored in the "proficient" and "advanced" category than boys. Conversely, twice as many boys scored "below basic" in all three grades. By the 12th grade, the average score for girls was nineteen points higher.

Girls outscore boys in civics and the arts.

On the 1998 NAEP Civics Report Card for the Nation, girls outscored boys at every grade level. Girls outperformed boys on the 1997 NAEP Arts Assessment in every category (music, theater, and visual arts) and in every category tested (creating, performing, and responding).

Girls hold their own in math.

The 1999 NAEP long-term trend math assessment shows that there is little difference between scores for girls and scores for boys in all three grades. The 2000 NAEP mathematics test also shows only a slight difference.

Girls are more likely to participate in school activities.

Girls outnumber boys with regard to membership in honor societies, school newspaper staff, debate clubs, and student government. More girls than boys participate in Advanced Placement courses. Girls are also more likely to participate in community service.

Girls are more likely than boys to graduate from high school and college.

Girls are more likely to enroll in college right after high school and to complete a bachelor's degree within five years.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★
There is evidence,
however, the problem
that WEEA programs
were created to address
may not even exist.

Teachers Cannot Do It All!

Dear AAE,

I have been reading some of the recent articles in *Education Matters*. I concur with the idea that colleges of teacher education do not hold the answer to better teachers. What appalls me more is that some of the best research that constructivists have to offer is being ignored. I teach Special Education and know from my research and educational experience on the topic of “learning” that if we do not consider the learning styles of students, particularly students who do not fit the mold of the “left-brained” style of lock-step learning, we are in for a tumble. If children do not take ownership in their learning, there is no retention.

If students do not want to learn, and parents do not exemplify a learning model for their children, the teacher is left twisting in the wind. It is immoral to hold a teacher responsible for bad parenting and lack of student motivation stemming from parental apathy. Let's get to the root of the problem. It takes a team of parents, student, and teacher to help a student be successful in education. Until we recognize this inevitability, we will not make any great strides in education.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★
It is immoral to hold a teacher responsible for bad parenting and lack of student motivation stemming from parental apathy.

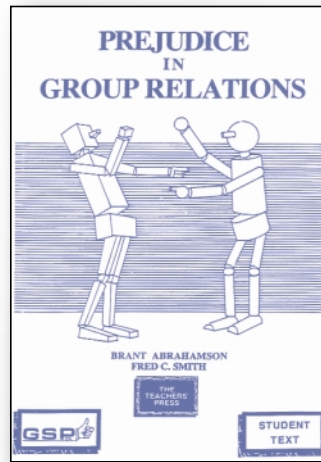
Furthermore, since many teachers do not consider where their students are developmentally, socially, emotionally, and educationally, they are just teaching subject matter to students, not teaching students subject matter. There is a difference. I would like to see a more balanced approach to the issue of improving our schools, teachers, and educational atmosphere. Teachers cannot do it all. There are bad teachers, just as there are bad students. We just do not have a very efficient and fair way of adjudicating this.

We are so naive as to think that children will learn a certain amount of information, master it and retain it, in a certain amount of time. Research says otherwise. Right-brained children take longer to process; therefore, they do not pass standardized, TIMED tests (from a left-brained viewpoint) very well. They are just as intelligent. They are led to believe that because they do not test well in someone else's opinion, they are stupid. Many end up in Special Education. I know, I deal with students like this every day.

This may sound like the rantings of a mad woman. I am mad, just not psychotic. I would like to see change. However, until we are all on the same page, with those of us who actually work in the trenches speaking out, we will not make any progress. I hope to see more information about what is being done that WORKS in school systems, not just what does not.

Thanks for allowing me to sound off.

—Dr. Lydia W. Meek
Vonore Elementary School
Resource Teacher (5-8)
Louisville, TN



Eliminating Prejudice

Dear AAE,

Currently we are facing a situation in which an extremely small fraction of a very large world religion is using terrorist tactics. Given these circumstances, we understand that police, the FBI, and members of other governmental agencies may have to use a degree of group-profiling for public safety reasons. The time necessary for reasoned analysis may be lacking. Nonetheless, a grave danger to our civil liberties exists if students and others translate their fears into prejudicial acts.

In this situation, we thought the included booklet might be useful to teachers with whom you work. My colleague and I prepared the “Prejudice in Group Relations” unit for the social studies core curriculum at Riverside-Brookfield High School, Riverside, Illinois where it continues to be used (as well as at other schools). We developed it to combat the racism, social class bias, and other kinds of negative stereotyping that we found in our school. Our focus is on having young people learn to judge people as individuals in their daily lives—rather than as representatives of some group in which they may be placed. This is a durable way of teaching tolerance, and it is one that seems appropriate at the present time.

The *Prejudice in Group Relations* booklets may be secured at half of their retail price if purchased through The Teachers' Press. Also, a teacher may photocopy any part of the unit for his or her students' use.

—Brant Abrahamson, Director
Riverside-Brookfield High School
Brookfield, IL

The Teachers' Press can be reached at 708-485-5983 or write to The Teachers' Press, 3731 Madison Ave., Brookfield, IL 60513-1559.

Higher Standards Are Not Enough

Dear AAE,

I can't tell you how much I look forward to my newsletter each month. It gives me hope (after thirteen teaching years of hopelessness) that education can actually meet the needs of our kids.

Regarding the Standards–Testing article in the January edition of *Education Matters*, by Chester Finn—

1. Standards alone are not enough. There is real paucity of adequate curriculum in place in our district. I hear the same complaint from teachers in districts around me. We need the support of the district in getting us the curriculum that really supports the standards.
2. Lack of strong leadership in retraining teachers in effective reading technique. Lots of teachers hired in the last ten years don't know anything but whole language-type reading. They haven't a clue how to teach systematic phonics and reading, never having been trained in those areas. You can hardly blame them, but the districts don't want to put money and personnel resources into retraining.
3. District curriculum “specialists” usually are paper pushers for the state government. They don't take (and hardly have time to take) an interest in curriculums that are proven to work, but aren't being presently touted by the state.

Some teachers in our district have been using the Direct Instruction Reading materials this year with HUGE success, especially with ESL and low ability (RSP) readers. We're able to make up to two years' growth in one year using this systematic, explicit method and that's with kids who have the “special ed” label as well as the kids who are “normal” readers. We only had about twelve out of sixty of our students reading on grade level (according to DI standards for decoding and comprehension) at the beginning of the year, and have been able to remediate those who needed it and accelerate those who can be accelerated using this exemplary program. However, because it has been around for a long time, our district is totally uninterested in looking at it as an instrument to get our children reading to grade level by third grade. I find the it's-got-to-be-new-or-it's-useless attitude outrageous in view of the fact that literally all the schools in our district have failed to meet the state standards for improvement.

Well, I'm sure others are having the same problems, but testing and standards are obviously not the entire solution and any more money spent doing more of the same we've been doing for the last ten years is money wasted.

Keep up the good work and thanks for your support for teachers and kids.

—Laura Cornwell
Palla Elementary School
Bakersfield, CA

A Model Tutoring Program for Disadvantaged Kids

Reading First, President Bush's initiative for educational reform, is now the law of the land. It has galvanized the educational community into contemplating various approaches of how to implement this mandate most effectively in order to achieve the best results possible.

While private-sector programs that focus on putting computers and Internet access in the classrooms of poor schools have garnered a lot of attention recently, some educators and community members say the real problem is not being addressed by the high-tech effort.

"What good is the Internet if you can't read?" says Mary Shaw, who has worked tirelessly over the years to open doors for educationally disadvantaged kids. "The key is reading—all else flows from that."

That statement could serve as the motto for the effort Ms. Shaw and a battalion of other community leaders have launched in Menlo Park, California. Their program, a nonprofit organization located on a school campus, offers one-on-one tutoring during and after school to children who are reading significantly below grade in the low-achieving Ravenswood City School District.

Using a systematic, intensive phonics teaching text developed by Dolores Hiskes as the heart of the curriculum, the *YES Reading Program* is a welcome supplement to classroom instruction at a school where a number of children speak a primary language other than English.

"Bringing student reading scores up to grade level cannot be accomplished by one classroom teacher with about thirty kids from just about that many different cultures," observes Ms. Shaw. "The majority of these students in urban low-income areas are from non-English speaking families, and our one-on-one tutoring by caring adult volunteers makes a great difference. We brought thirty kids up to grade level last year."

Calling the tutoring program "an outstanding model," School Board member Emily Garfield says she hopes other such programs are developed. "If youngsters can't read, it's a disaster for them—and not just academically," she says. "It washes over into just about everything."

This independent, privately-run tutoring program is conducted in a double-size portable classroom donated by Stanford University and renovated by the University Rotary Club of Palo Alto. It is located on the Belle Haven Elementary School Campus because that school had the lowest reading scores in the district.

Its success has surprised everyone. There are now over sixty enthusiastic volunteer tutors from the local community. *YES Reading* has also received a grant from the Peninsula Community Foundation and Yahoo!, as well as generous donations from many of the tutors themselves. Organizers are hoping for more such funding.



All tutors are trained to use the teaching method employed in Hiskes' *Phonics Pathways*, and find the simple, progressive, step-by-step lessons very clear and easy to follow as well as easy to teach. It is a gratifying experience for students and tutors alike.

"We have developed an easy-to-use but structured and comprehensive reading, spelling, and comprehension curriculum. Best of all, no prior teaching experience is necessary. This, along with flexible scheduling for volunteers, makes it possible for the community to help," says Ms. Shaw.

The tutoring is two-tiered. On Mondays and Thursdays a dedicated core of highly-committed adult community leaders tutor children in the Center. High school and college students volunteer for the after-school and summer tutoring programs.

Students are referred by classroom teachers, and are evaluated when they enter the program. An ongoing evaluation is continued until they have achieved grade level, at which time they graduate from the program. Upon graduation each child receives a book of their choice, is congratulated in front of his classmates, and receives a certificate of graduation at an end-of-the-year ceremony for students, teachers, parents, and tutors.

YES Reading is being hailed by the teachers, administrators, and parents as a bright ray of hope for the future of kids who were falling between the cracks.

Molly McCrory, who with Ms. Shaw and Jean Bacigalupi founded the volunteer effort, says one visit to a tutoring session should be enough to convince others to sign up. "With one of our children for a half-hour, they'd be hooked," she says. "It is a way to take a child and change the life of that child."

Ms. Bacigalupi, who has volunteered her time and effort to many causes in her life, recalls how she became involved as a tutor. "I was tired of sitting on boards—I wanted to work with children." She says the work is greatly satisfying, and she takes additional pleasure in sending a child who is mastering reading skills home with books so he can read to his younger siblings.

Ms. Shaw says the program enriches the lives of everyone involved. "I walk in now and kids throw their arms around me," she says, beaming. In fact, the program appears to have won over kids who initially had to be dragged in kicking to the library. "At the beginning, the kids were terri-

fied," recalls Ms. McCrory. "Some had tears in their eyes, and jackets over their heads." Now, Ms. Shaw adds, "it's really hard to get some of these kids to leave when the session is over."

Fifth-grader Ruby shyly confides that she comes for extra tutoring whenever there is room. Smiles Ruby, "The tutors help me read better, so I can pass my grade. If I'm stuck they show me how to do it. They care about me and love me!" Young José enthusiastically concurs. He never used to like to read or raise his hand in class. Now, after graduating from *YES Reading*, he states, "I learned a lot, and it felt good. The tutors helped me learn to read. It's fun!" He very proudly adds, "Now, after I sound out a big word, I know what it means. When I got my book and certificate, I was so happy and proud!"

The teachers and administrators are just as enthusiastic about *YES Reading*. Amanda Feld, a 5th grade teacher, observes, "Students are able to read in a short amount of time. There is a huge amount of improvement in performance and self-esteem. Kids who didn't like to read come back all fired up and are achievement-oriented, and tutors are responsive to the needs of teachers as well. I love this program!"

"It has made a dramatic difference" for children in her class, relates fifth-grade teacher Terri Ferraguto, who sends five of her students to half-hour sessions twice a week. One boy who began class last fall reading at kindergarten level is now reading at third-grade level after two or three months of tutoring, she notes. Just as important, she adds, is how "the one-on-one attention has made such a big difference in his behavior in the classroom."

Clearly, *YES Reading* has evolved into a highly successful state-of-the-art reading center where volunteers are helping to give students the skills they need to succeed in school now and to become productive members of our society later.

Mary Shaw smiles with quiet pride, "We are making a long-lasting positive impact on our community by teaching students to read and by fostering relationships between students and volunteers of diverse backgrounds. Students improve in self-confidence, and feel more capable of achieving their goals. Older students are less likely to fall into the juvenile justice system."

Mary states, "The *YES Reading* Board envisions our tutoring center as a model that could be replicated in other communities, working in partnership with teachers and schools to help solve the problem of illiteracy in today's complex and multinational society.

"Already we have computer centers in most schools. Why not reading centers? We are no longer little red school houses when one teacher had fewer children, taught simpler subjects, and had help from families who mostly spoke English. Reading centers such as ours would go a long way toward addressing the overwhelming state of illiteracy in this country today." **EM**

For information about *Phonics Pathways* contact Dolores G. Hiskes at dor@dorbooks.com, or go to <http://www.dorbooks.com>. For information about *YES Reading*, contact Mary Shaw, 650-322-5756 or the *Yes Reading* office at 650-326-0996.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★
We are no longer
little red school
houses when one
teacher had fewer
children, taught simpler
subjects, and had help from families
who mostly
spoke English.



Massachusetts Teachers Union Opposes English Immersion

Fresh from victories in California and Arizona, California business activist Ron Unz took his English immersion campaign to Massachusetts, where he hopes to place an initiative on the November ballot that would largely eliminate bilingual education in the state. As with his previous campaigns, Unz has assembled an impressive team of local Hispanic educators to move the initiative forward. He has the added advantage of a track record. Although his opponents dispute the positive results English immersion has achieved in California, even Unz's most vocal critics admit that the disaster they predicted has not occurred.

The Massachusetts Teachers Association, which declared its opposition to the initiative, is already behind the power curve. Last week, the union announced that "some changes need to be made to the current system of bilingual education, and have formed a task force of educators to explore the options." The task force consists of twenty-six union officers, representatives, and staff—presumably to cover all points of view on the issue from A to Z.

In March 1998, the California Teachers Association was trying to formulate a strategy to defeat Unz's initiative. After polling focus groups, David Sanchez, now CTA's secretary-treasurer, told a group of union activists what the best approach would be. "Don't even try to defend bilingual education," he said. **EM**

Source—*The Education Intelligence Agency conducts public education research, analysis, and investigations. Director: Mike Antonucci. Ph: 916-422-4373. Fax: 916-392-1482. E-Mail: EducationIntel@aol.com*

High School Tests High-tech Weapon Scanner

Officials at Skyline High School in Longmont, Colorado are about to employ a new tool in their effort to keep their students safe: a sophisticated weapon-scanning technology originally developed for military use.

The high-tech security system, initially designed to track enemy submarines, will be installed at each of the school's entrances to scan for weapons as students enter the building. The system's creators say it is superior to the metal detectors used in most schools and airports today.

A representative from WorldNet Technologies, the Bellevue, Washington company that makes the WeaponScan 80 system, approached participants

in a Colorado education convention and asked for volunteers to become a demonstration site for the technology in K-12 education. Skyline's safety committee unanimously agreed to become a pilot site at no cost to the school.

"We know that the worst-case scenario is probably not going to be prevented," said St. Vrain Valley School District Superintendent Richard Weber. "We're just trying to increase the probability that this kind of intervention may have a usefulness in catching instruments that may come into a school." **EM**

—For more information on this story, go to <http://www.eschoolnews.com/news/showstory.cfm?ArticleID=3474>

Source—eSchool News, Associate Editor Elizabeth B. Guerard.

New Jersey Stands Up for Founding Fathers

By Amy C. Sims

A patriotic charge from New Jersey parents and legislators has prevented the state's Board of Education from nixing the Founding Fathers from the school curriculum.

But months of hearings still lie ahead to flesh out the details of precisely what early American history kids in New Jersey will learn, and what will go the educational way of George Washington's chopped-down cherry tree.

The controversy began when the outgoing education commissioner omitted the names of the Founding Fathers in a draft of the state's proposed history standards.

That action was sharply criticized by State Sen. Gerald Cardinale, who accused the educational establishment of wanting to "hijack" history. "They've got the tools and the authority, and if we don't call public attention to it they will be successful," he said.

Cardinale drafted a joint resolution, which has similar powers of a bill, stating any teacher who doesn't teach about the Founding Fathers would lose tenure and employment. State Assemblyman Joseph Pennacchio introduced similar legislation.

William L. Librera, who became commissioner in January, reversed the board's earlier action, and in doing so clearly stated his priorities.

"The administration is irrevocably committed to ensuring that our nation's Founding Fathers, including George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and other key historical figures, are a clear part of this state's social studies curriculum standards," he said in a news release.

The issue is not unique to New Jersey. During the 1960s, history textbooks in Virginia had ten times more coverage of George Washington than today's texts, according to James Rees, executive director of Mount Vernon, the Founding Father's estate.

"It's shameful how little we teach our children about Washington and other Founding Fathers," he said.

Rees has sent out George Washington "kits," which contain learning material, to classrooms in forty-two states. "The good news is the teachers are

using them," he said. "It's not that they don't want to teach about this, they just don't have the materials."

Studies have repeatedly shown that students across the country have forgotten or never learned even the most basic lessons of American history.

As for New Jersey, Cardinale and others promised vigilance in keeping up educational standards. **EM**

Source—Amy Sims, Fox News. For more information about George Washington kits, visit www.mountvernon.org/education.

Preschool for All? CED Says "Absolutely"

In February, the Committee for Economic Development (CED) sponsored a keynote speaker and forum to launch a new policy statement entitled *Preschool for All: Investing in a Productive and Just Society*. The forum consisted of Adele Simmons, Vice Chair of Chicago Metropolitan 2020 and former President of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation; Roy J. Bostock, Chairman, Executive Committee, B/Com3 Group, Inc.; and Janet Hanson, Vice-President for Education, CED. The statement by the CED's Research and Policy Committee urges that education for all children three to five years of age be available, with federal and state support leading the way to the financial support that would be required by the policy.

CED is a prestigious organization whose members are business leaders and university presidents. Although the policy statement recommends that private nonprofit and for-profit entities be eligible to utilize the funds made available for preschool, it also urges states and local communities to develop the standards for teachers and facilities; however, providers that do not meet the state standards would not be eligible for federal support.

Considered jointly, these recommendations would probably lead to a childcare industry very similar to the K-12 education industry: a large majority of children in public institutions and a relatively small minority in nonprofit and for-profit organizations. In this connection, it is interesting that the funding for the research and publication of the report was largely, if not entirely, from philanthropic foundations widely regarded as "liberal" culturally and politically.

Furthermore, the keynote speaker was former North Carolina governor James B. Hunt, Jr., who devoted most of his comments to North Carolina's program for child care. In view of Mr. Hunt's close ties to the NEA, it was not surprising that universal childcare would result in several hundred thousand more NEA members and tens, if not hundreds, of millions more in union revenues. It will be interesting to see how conservative policy organizations and leaders react to this proposed expansion of federal involvement in childcare. **EM**

Source—*Education Policy Institute (EPI). EPI seeks to improve education through research, policy analysis, and the development of responsible alternatives to existing policies and practices. Visit their website at www.educationpolicy.org. Phone: 202-244-7535. The complete policy statement about Preschool for All is available at www.ced.org, or call 1-212-688-2063.*

“Teach for America” Success Points the Way to Teacher Certification Reform

By George C. Leef

One of our nation's great scandals is that large numbers of teachers—especially at inner-city schools—are ill-prepared for their jobs. Sure, they've been through programs at “schools of education” and received teaching certificates, having satisfied the requirements of their states' certification laws. But, as test after test has shown, these qualifications, instead of guaranteeing excellent reading, writing, and math skills, can often conceal poor skills.

To make matters worse, many middle- and high-school teachers have little or no background in the subjects they are trying to teach. Students preparing to be teachers must concentrate so much on faddish courses dealing with education “theory” that they have little room for studying concrete disciplines such as math, science, or history in much depth. Many of those serious-minded enough to understand the futility of this exercise—usually those who would make the best teachers—opt for an alternative career.

And why shouldn't they? After all, one of the strongest beliefs of today's monopoly education establishment is the “progressive” idea that students must be allowed to “construct their own knowledge.” Schools of education inculcate the idea that teachers should serve as “a guide on the side,” rather than “a sage on the stage.” Most teachers, therefore, spend years taking courses in educational theory and pick up whatever they learn on the subjects they teach as they go along.

The terrible folly and injustice of this system has been evident to some critical observers for many years. One person who decided to do something about it was Wendy Kopp. As a senior at Princeton University in 1989, Wendy realized that there were excellent students at top colleges who had a strong desire to teach but were put off by the education school routine. She set out to create a pathway for those individuals into the teaching ranks. Her brainchild, Teach for America (TFA), was born in 1990.

Teach for America, based in New York City, seeks graduates with degrees in English, history, math, science, and other fields, who want to go into teaching. Recruits from schools such as the University of Michigan, Northwestern, and UCLA must meet strict standards: only 27 percent are accepted. They must commit to teaching for at least two years in difficult inner-city or rural schools. And they receive intensive training in how to handle a classroom during the summer prior to beginning their teaching duties.

When TFA started, it was attacked by education school zealots on the grounds that it would short-change students who needed “real teachers.” But the right question to ask is not what paper credentials teachers have, but whether they do a good job.

The Houston Independent School District (HISD) has been employing TFA teachers since 1993. In 2001, Stanford University's Hoover Institution became interested in seeing how student learning outcomes compared between classrooms taught by TFA teachers and non-TFA teachers. Studying HISD data from 1996 through 2000, the researchers concluded that “the impact of having a TFA teacher was always positive . . . TFA is a viable and valuable source of teachers and that they perform as well as, and in many cases better than, other teachers hired by HISD.” The study also found that TFA teachers were consistently the highest performing teachers, whereas the least-productive teachers were invariably non-TFA teachers.

This is great news for Michigan—because this year, for the first time, Teach for America is sending a delegation of teachers into Detroit public schools.

Initially, between thirty and fifty TFA teachers will be assigned to several Detroit schools, probably two per school. They will help to fill the teacher shortages Detroit schools have experienced in the areas of math and science. Amazingly, almost a quarter of TFA recruits have undergraduate backgrounds in math, science, and engineering.

Teach for America's numbers are still quite small, having placed just 7,000 teachers in the past twelve years. But there is no reason why

TFA should be the only source of teachers who don't have the dubious education school pedigree.

The excellence of this program provides an object lesson lawmakers should write in their legislative notebooks: It's time to reconsider teacher certification laws that can lead to mediocrity, and give principals back the freedom to hire teachers who will do a good job. **EM**

George C. Leef is director of the Pope Center for Higher Education Policy in Raleigh, North Carolina and an adjunct scholar with the Mackinac Center for Public Policy. The Mackinac Center is a nonpartisan research and educational organization devoted to improving the quality of life for all Michigan citizens by promoting sound solutions to state and local policy questions. Mackinac assists policy makers, scholars, business people, the media, and the public by providing objective analysis of issues. Visit The Mackinac Center's web-site at www.mackinac.org, or call them at them at 1-800-224-3327.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Wendy realized that there were excellent students at top colleges who had a strong desire to teach, but were put off by the education school routine.

New Web-Site Lesson Plans on Founding Fathers

The Claremont Institute, in Claremont, California has produced a new multimedia web-site to teach students and citizens about the importance of George Washington and the Founding Fathers. Foundingfather.com teaches Washington not merely as a historical figure, but as a man of great character. In this way, Foundingfather.com illustrates the indissoluble union between civic virtue and self-government.

Notice to Teachers: The Claremont Institute invites you to review a lesson plan on religious liberty and the American Founding, located in the “Washington in the Classroom” section of their new web-site on George Washington www.FoundingFather.com.

You will also find the original text of Washington's Thanksgiving proclamation, as well as hundreds of other original source documents, in the “Washington Collection” section of the web-site.

This is a free resource, and Claremont encourages you to download any materials you might find useful in your classroom instruction.

To be added on their Civics Bulletin list, or to comment on the web-site, write to info@claremont.org, or call 909-621-6825.

Editor's note—For another great resource on the Founding Fathers, check out *The Heritage Foundation's The Founders' Almanac*—a practical guide to the notable events, greatest leaders, and most eloquent words of the American Founding www.heritage.org/almanac/welcome.html.

Giving Teachers a Break

President Bush's budget proposal calling for a special tax break for teachers has just become law. The new law allows teachers to claim an above-the-line deduction on their 2002 Federal tax returns when they spend their own money on classroom materials. Personal payments for continuing education courses will also qualify.

The deduction applies to up to \$400 of such expenses. This initiative recognizes in just a small way the personal sacrifice most teachers make for their students. **EM**

Source—EdFacts a weekly publication of Family Research Council, www.frc.org.

Good News for Teachers— The Family is Making a Comeback

For those in education who know how important a solid family unit is to a student's learning environment, here is some good news.

After more than three decades of relentless advance, the family structure revolution in the U.S. may be over. A series of recent independent reports, based largely on data from the 2000 Census, all suggest that the trend of family fragmentation that many analysts had assumed to be unstoppable—yearly increases in unwed child-bearing and divorce, resulting in ever greater proportions of children living in one-parent homes—suddenly stopped in its tracks in about 1995.

Here are the data. The proportion of all U.S. families with children under age eighteen that are headed by married couples reached an all-time low in the mid 1990s—about 72.9 percent in 1996 and 72.4 percent in 1997—but since then has stabilized. The figure for 2000 is 73 percent. Similarly, the proportion of all U.S. children living in two-parent homes reached an all-time low in the mid 1990s, but since then has also stabilized. In fact, the proportion of children in two-parent homes increased from 68 percent in 1999 to 69.1 percent in 2000.

Looking only at white, non-Hispanic children, a study by Allan Dupree and Wendell Primus finds that the proportion of these children living with two married parents stopped its downward descent during the late 1990s, and even increased slightly from 1999 to 2000, rising from 77.3 to 78.2 percent. Another study from the Urban Institute finds that, among all U.S. children, the proportion living with their two biological or adoptive parents increased by 1.2 percent from 1997 to 1999, while during the same period the proportion living in step-families (or blended families) decreased by 0.1 percentage points and the proportion living in single-parent homes decreased by two percentage points. (The study finds that in 1999 about 64 percent of all U.S. children lived with their two biological or adoptive parents, while about 25 percent lived with one parent and about 8 percent lived in a step or blended family.) Among low-income children, the decline in the proportion living in single-parent homes was even more pronounced, dropping from 44 percent in 1997 to 41 percent in 1999.

Here is perhaps the most dramatic statistic. From 1995 to 2000, the proportion of African-

American children living in two-parent married-couple homes rose from 34.8 to 38.9 percent, a significant increase in just five years, representing the clear cessation and even reversal of the long-term shift toward Black family fragmentation.

These changes are not large or definitive, but they are certainly suggestive. And if they continue, they will change the lives of millions of U.S. children and families for the better. Moreover, the potential implications for our national debate are enormous. Instead of saying endlessly that we need to reverse the trend of fragmentation, what if we will soon be able to say, for the first time in decades, that our national priority is to sustain the current trend of reintegration? **EM**

Source—The American Values Reporter, published by the Institute for American Values. Visit the Institute's web-site at www.americanvalues.org to read commentaries by Institute leaders on the September 11th challenge, including: "What is the Truth that Has Been Revealed to Us?" by Jean Bethke Elstain, and "What are American Values?" by David Blankenhorn.

How to Implement an Internet Child Protection Program for Middle School Children in Your District

Introducing Web Wise Kids

Web Wise Kids™ (WWK) is a new nonprofit organization that equips children to make wise choices on the Internet. WWK implements Internet protection programs across the country in conjunction with schools, law enforcement, libraries, and other nonprofit organizations.

The program has generated tremendous response and is currently being implemented by such entities as: Orange County, California school system; the Polly Klaas Foundation; Boys and Girls Clubs; YWCA/YMCAs; American Prosecutors Research Institute; The GREAT program for gang resistance; High Tech Crimes Consortium; SEARCH; PowerUP; School Resource Officers; Juvenile Justice Offices; U.S. Military Schools; and the Salvation Army.

The Problem

- Twenty percent of children have received a sexual solicitation online. (U.S. Dept. of Justice, 3-01)
- Twenty-nine percent of children who surf the net would freely give out their home address and 14 percent would freely give out their e-mail address if asked. (News Telegraph, NOP Research Group, Jan. 17, 2002)

- Children are reported missing at the rate of 750,000 per year, 2,054 kids per day, or three children every two minutes. (National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, NCMEC)
- Forty of abductions for 15 to 17-year-old teenagers are due to Internet activity. (NCMEC)

The Solution

The *Missing* detective computer game is the center point of the Web Wise Kids program. This interactive CD-ROM game is designed for the 11 to 14 year age group and is based on the true story of a 14-year-old teenager who was persuaded by an online predator to leave home and cross an international border in order to meet personally. In the game, police detectives enlist the help of the player to help solve the crime and find the teenager before he disappears. Players are then encouraged to design their own guidelines for Internet safety.

Missing works because it appeals to children through their medium, a computer game. By making them part of the team that tries to find the missing teenager, it draws them in and captures their attention in a way that "another lecture from an adult" can never do. The children internalize the need for online safety.

Missing was launched in February 2000 with 10,000 copies distributed to schools and libraries across Canada. Web Wise Kids fully trains all teachers, law enforcement personnel, and others who administer the game. CD-ROMS, workbooks, and a lesson plan are included.

What Others Are Saying about This Approach

- California School Superintendent William Habermehl, Orange County, California: "It has been my pleasure to be associated with Web Wise Kids for more than a year. As the program was piloted at the Orange County Department of Education, **it was thoroughly evaluated and we are extremely pleased with the results.**"
- The Polly Klaas Foundation: "The *Missing* game is an excellent tool for alerting children about how to avoid the dangers on the internet. **We at the Foundation are excited about this new tool, which provides a positive and preventative approach to the tragedies we deal with every day.**" **EM**

For more information, visit www.WebWiseKids.org or call 1-866-WebWise (toll free).

Teacher Celebrates, and Makes, History

By Joe Nathan

Will Fitzhugh is a man who saw something that needed doing and did it.

After ten years as a public school teacher in Concord, Mass., Fitzhugh saw that “varsity athletes were celebrated everywhere. It was time to celebrate varsity academics.”

Fitzhugh created *The Concord Review*, the only magazine in the United States that prints outstanding essays about American history written by high school students. Since 1987, the *Review* has published 528 essays, written by students in forty-two states (including Minnesota and Wisconsin) and thirty-three countries. It’s a fascinating magazine, and a terrific tribute to academic excellence.

A recent issue of the *Review* featured essays by students from Minnesota (Hopkins) and Wisconsin (Racine). Neil Mehrotra originally wrote an essay for his Advanced Placement class at Hopkins High School about debates over what powers the federal government has. Lance Blakeman of J.I. Case High School in Racine wrote about the World War II bombing of Coventry, England, for an International Baccalaureate class.

Both essays match the best writing that I see from University of Minnesota graduate students, and I’m not criticizing graduate students. Mehrotra and Blakeman wrote clear, thoughtful essays with many fascinating details. It’s great to see their skill and knowledge shared and acknowledged.

Twice when I was in secondary school, a teacher inspired me to pick something that hap-

pened in American history, research, and write about it. Once I wrote about the Gadsden Purchase, an obscure, important purchase of land by the U.S. government in the American Southwest. The second time, I wrote about the Teapot Dome, a 1920s scandal in which a huge amount of federally owned oil was sold at very low prices.

In each case, I loved learning about these incidents, about what people had done to make them happen, how advocates and opponents battled, how decisions finally were made, and what the consequences were. History can show us how people tried to get something done. Properly understood, history can help us almost every day, as we consider how to live our lives.

Is this a bit overblown? I don’t think so. History is much more than memorizing names and dates. It’s really the story of people, often very much like us.

Fitzhugh says he has received letters from students and teachers saying that the eleven essays published in each issue inspire them to work harder, to accomplish more. That’s one of his goals. And he has wonderful letters praising the magazine from famous historians.

By honoring excellent work, Fitzhugh isn’t just celebrating history. He’s making it. **EM**

Joe Nathan is director of the Center for School Change at the University of Minnesota’s Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs. You can reach him via e-mail at nathan@hhh.umn.edu or in care of the Pioneer Press at 345 Cedar St., St. Paul, MN 55101.

For more information about The Concord Review visit their web-site at www.tcr.org.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★
History is much more
than memorizing names
and dates. It’s really the
story of people, often
very much like us.

New American Patriotism Program Introduced

K12, Inc., and William J. Bennett, the former U.S. Secretary of Education, unveiled the “American Patriotism Program,” which features Internet-based education lessons about the history and founding principles of the United States of America, and is being made available worldwide **at no cost**.

Bennett, chairman of K12, said, “We must teach the next generation why the United States is worth defending, and we can use computer technology to do exactly that. Our Founding Fathers taught us that we defend our nation when we love and cherish her, and that we fully love and cherish her only when we understand her. That’s what these lessons are about.”

The American Patriotism Program is designed for children of all ages and features multi-layered lessons, colorful online storybooks, maps, art activities, and sing-alongs. The lessons are delivered through K12’s web-site (www.K12.com). Each lesson comes from K12’s history curriculum, which includes several hundred more lessons on America and other subjects in kindergarten, first, and second grades. **EM**

K12’s patriotism lessons can be accessed, at no charge, by logging on to www.K12.com or calling 1-888-968-7512.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Wasting Education Dollars:

(Continued from cover)

Boys are twice as likely to be enrolled in special education programs.

Boys are four times more likely than girls to be diagnosed with disabilities such as dyslexia, autism, and stuttering.

Boys are more likely to experience academic or behavioral problems.

Boys are more likely to repeat a grade. They are more likely to be suspended or to be involved with crime, drugs, and alcohol. Boys are more likely than girls to report violent victimization at school.

A Diversion of Vital Resources

An unwarranted focus on the purported problem of gender inequity diverts funds and attention from the real and critical problems in America’s educational system, such as striking disparities in academic performance among different racial and economic groups and an overall decline in student educational achievement. It is time to reform the federal education system to focus on the most critical problems in American education.

Conclusion

The focus should be on what can be done to improve the educational performance of all students. This is the intent of President George W. Bush’s *No Child Left Behind* education reform plan, which seeks to focus the ESEA on key national priorities, including programs that effectively boost the academic performance of economically disadvantaged children.

In line with the President’s recommendations, Congress should seek to consolidate funds previously designated for duplicative, ineffective, and unnecessary programs (including the Women’s Educational Equity Act) and channel these resources to several broadly defined, flexible funding streams. This consolidation would provide greater flexibility and decision-making at the local level, which would help to ensure that funds—previously directed to 61 separate ESEA programs—are used most effectively and where they are most needed.

It is time to stop scattering funds among a plethora of programs, many of which are duplicative, irrelevant, and wasteful, and to channel our education resources where they will be most effective. The real achievement gap is not between genders but between what American students have learned and what they need to know to have the prospect of a successful and fulfilling future. **EM**

—Krista Kafer is a Senior Policy Analyst for Education at The Heritage Foundation. Krista researches and writes on all aspects of education policy, including school choice, standardized testing, and character education.

For additional articles authored by Krista Kafer, visit www.heritage.org.

“Talking Textbooks” Introduced

In December 2001, Paradigm Accelerated Curriculum, Inc. (PAC) demonstrated for the public a ninth-grade Integrated Physics and Chemistry course in an audio-optical format by which students see and hear the textbook on a computer screen. The demonstration took place at a new charter school in Dublin, Texas.

The new course was designed by Ronald E. Johnson, Ph.D. and PAC staff member to address the needs of ninth-grade students who have limited visual or auditory abilities or who need to learn on an individual program. The “Talking Textbooks” are a combination of PAC courses and the Kurzweil 3000™ software (a product of Kurzweil Educational Systems, Inc.), which allows students to adjust the reading speed, type size, and the volume as preferred.

The Kurzweil 3000™ software translates and defines unfamiliar words into audible and visible Spanish, French, Italian, German, and Dutch languages, enabling application

of PAC courses for students for whom English is a second language (ESL). Previews elicited such responses as “wonderful,” “This is the ultimate ESL tool,” and “This product is years ahead of anything I have seen.”

Dr. Johnson said, “The new “Talking Textbooks” demonstrate the intent of Texas Legislature to empower charters and entrepreneurs to introduce innovative ways to address educational needs.” Dr. Johnson’s reputation as an educational entrepreneur caught the attention of an Indiana businessman who provided a generous grant to allow Dr. Johnson to research, design, and produce individualized courses and “Dr. Johnson’s Talking Textbooks.”

The innovative “Talking Textbooks” present IPC in an engaging manner that avoids use of complicated algebraic formulas. Each of the 180 daily lessons presents background information on scientists who discovered components of the periodic element chart, and ties the original discoveries to modern technology, physics, and chemistry.

Johnson designed the IPC course in print format to help address the critical national teacher shortage in high school science classrooms. Application of the Kurzweil 3000™ software enabled him to produce talking textbooks that fit comfortably into schools or institutions where students must complete prescribed ninth grade courses for graduation. Other “talking” courses soon to be unveiled will include U.S. History, Basic Science, and English Language Skills.

The ninth grade IPC “Talking Textbooks” are scheduled for release this February in time to help students who failed the first semester in conventional classrooms. **EM**

For more information about the Paradigm Accelerated Curriculum, call 254-445-4272 or visit www.pacworks.com. Inquiries about Kurzweil Educational Systems, Inc. may be addressed to David Bradburn at 781-203-5018 or visit www.kurzweilededu.com.

AAE Member Receives Special Appointment!



Patsy Fischer

Patricia Fischer, an AAE member and an officer and board member of our Oklahoma state affiliate (Association of Professional Oklahoma Educators), was selected by the U.S. Department of Education to serve on a top level committee.

U.S. Assistant Secretary of Elementary and Secondary Education Susan B. Neuman announced that Patricia will serve as one of the 21 members of the negotiating committee that will help develop new rules related to standards and assessments under Title I (Part A) of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

Comprised of education practitioners, including state and local education administrators, teachers, school board members

and also parents, the committee assembled in Washington, D.C. in mid-March to negotiate the substance of draft regulations.

Title I is designed to help disadvantaged children meet high academic standards. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, signed into law on January 8, 2002, amended the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and provides support for federal education programs including Title I programs operated by school districts.

The U.S. Department of Education (ED) asked for advice and recommendations on Title I regulatory issues from state and local education administrators, parents, teachers, paraprofessionals, school board members and others, in a Jan. 18 Federal Register notice. The law requires that ED select participants from among those who submitted comments, a total of more than 100 organizations (including the AAE).

Patricia has been teaching since 1979 and also serves as the Director of Migrant Education/Title I for the Hooker Public School System in Hooker, Oklahoma. In 1999, she was appointed by Governor Frank Keating as Commissioner for Oklahoma Commission for Teacher Preparation.

“I am eager and willing to serve on this committee and consider it an honor and a great opportunity to offer a classroom teacher’s perspective,” says Patricia. She adds, “Every child is entitled to the same quality education and standard of high expectations. Therefore, we need to overlook race or status. If they are in our classroom, then we must educate them. And we must stop looking for excuses.”

Congratulations, Patricia! We’re proud of you and pleased that you’re our representative.



Gary Beckner
Managing Editor
Pieterke Beckner
Associate Editor
Diane Meyer
Editorial Assistant
Kelley Autry
Research
Ron Law
Newsletter Design & Layout

★★ Advisory Board ★★

Leta Rains Andrews • Tracey Bailey
Patricia Ann Baltz • Gene Bedley
Polly Broussard • Eric Buehrer
Dr. Kevin Ryan • Guy Rice Doud
Thomas A. Fleming • Valerie Anderson Hill
Dr. Lewis Hodge • Dr. William Kilpatrick

EducationMatters is published by the Association of American Educators. For more information, contact AAE, 25201 Paseo de Alicia, Suite 104, Laguna Hills, CA 92653
(949) 595-7979
(800) 704-7799
Fax (949) 595-7970
E-mail: info@aaeteachers.org
Website: aaeteachers.org

©2002 by Association of American Educators