

Education Matters

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The Desperate Need for an Education Stimulus

An Education Crisis Preceded the Economic Crisis

Do you know the correct definition of free enterprise? If you're scratching your head—you're not alone. Seventy-one percent of those surveyed failed, so reports the Intercollegiate Studies Institute (ISI) in its study *Our Fading Heritage*. Other shocking findings that prove Americans aren't making the grade when it comes to economics:

- Forty-six percent of those with a bachelor's degree could not define free enterprise as a system in which individuals create, exchange, and control goods and resources
- Forty percent of those with a bachelor's degree do not know business profit equals revenue minus expenses

"People may be listening to television experts talk about economic bailouts and the platforms of political candidates, but they apparently have little idea what our basic economic and political institutions are," observes Dr. Richard Brake, ISI's director of University Stewardship.

More than 2,500 randomly selected Americans took ISI's basic 33-question test on civic literacy and more than 1,700 people failed, with the average score 49 percent, or an "F." Elected officials scored even lower than the general public with an average score of 44 percent, and only 0.8 percent (or 21) of all surveyed earned an "A."

"There is an epidemic of economic, political, and historical ignorance in our country," says Josiah Bunting, III, chairman of ISI's National Civic Literacy Board. "It is disturbing enough that the general public failed ISI's civic literacy test, but when you consider the even more dismal scores of elected officials, you have to be concerned. How can political leaders make informed decisions if they don't understand the American experience?"

One of the questions on the ISI quiz:

Which of the following fiscal combinations would a government most likely follow to stimulate economic activity when the economy is in a severe recession?

- A. Increasing both taxes and spending
- B. Increasing taxes and decreasing spending
- C. Decreasing taxes and increasing spending
- D. Decreasing both taxes and spending

Apolitical economists agree on one answer. However, the majority of elected officials who took the quiz failed to select that answer.

Further demonstrating the minimal influence of college in advancing civic literacy, ISI discovered that the civic knowledge



calculable advantage of training up able counselors to administer the affairs of our country in all its departments—legislative, executive, and judiciary—and to bear their proper share in the councils of our national government; nothing more than education advancing the prosperity, the power, and the happiness of the nation.”

To this end, Jefferson and Madison later led the university’s board of visitors in making specific proposals for the civics curriculum. It included works by John Locke and Algernon Sidney for “the general principles of liberty,” the Declaration of Independence for the “distinctive principles” of the U.S. government, *The Federalist* for the “genuine meaning” of the U.S. Constitution, and Washington’s Farewell Address for “political lessons of peculiar value.”

Our Fading Heritage demonstrates that Americans today expect no less from our colleges than the founders did. A majority believes that colleges should prepare citizen leaders by teaching America’s heritage.

Standards of Accountability

ISI calls upon administrators, trustees, faculty, donors, taxpayers, parents, and elected officials to reevaluate collegiate curricula and standards of accountability. For example:

- Do colleges require courses in American history, politics, economics, and other core areas?
- Do colleges assess the civic or overall learning of their graduates?
- Do elected officials link college appropriations to real measures of civic or overall learning?
- Do parents make college selection choices based upon a school’s actual academic performance?

For the past three years, ISI has documented the failure of America’s institutions of higher learning to transmit to their students a basic understanding of the fundamental history, texts, and institutions of the American republic.

For too long, America’s colleges and universities have been evaluated not on their actual academic performance but primarily on their past prestige and endowments. Now that the verdict of failure is in, and with tuitions continuing to skyrocket, it is time for leaders inside and outside of the academy with a stake in the future of American higher education to roll up their sleeves and get to work addressing the shortcomings

documented in ISI’s civic literacy reports. The time for reform is now. If we fail to teach our children how American freedom was established and preserved, we cannot expect them to pass it on to future generations. ■

All thirty-three questions and ISI’s Our Fading Heritage report are available at www.americancivilliteracy.org. For more information on what educators can do to increase civic learning, go to www.americancivilliteracy.org

gained from the combination of engaging in frequent conversations about public affairs, reading about current events and history, and participating in advanced civic activities is greater than the gain from an expensive bachelor’s degree alone. Conversely, talking on the phone, watching owned or rented movies, and monitoring TV news broadcasts and documentaries diminish a respondent’s civic literacy.

Dr. Brake says, “Our study raises significant questions about whether citizens who voted in this year’s landmark presidential election really understand how our economic system works.”

A Call to Reform

When Jefferson, Madison, and other leading Virginians signed the plan for establishing the University of Virginia, they knew it needed to be compelling for the legislature to commission it. For the university to have a claim to state funding, it needed a public purpose. That principle still applies. Given that most citizens never attend college, what do they get from subsidizing it?

One benefit envisioned by Jefferson and Madison was that the university would preserve the nation’s memory and increase its general store of knowledge.

“And it cannot be but that each generation succeeding to the knowledge acquired by all those who preceded it, adding to it their own acquisitions and discoveries, and handing the mass down for successive and constant accumulation, must advance the knowledge and well-being of mankind,” they wrote in what has come to be known as the *Rockfish Gap* report (named for the location where they wrote it).

These Founding Fathers also restated their conviction that the university would create leaders to preserve liberty: “Nor must we omit to mention, among the benefits of education, the in-

“Our study raises significant questions about whether citizens who voted in this year’s landmark presidential election really understand how our economic system works.”

More Startling Facts

Americans (including politicians) are ignorant of American history

Of the 2,508 Americans taking ISI's civic literacy test, 71 percent fail. Nationwide, the average score on the test is only 49 percent. The vast majority cannot recognize the language of Lincoln's famous speech.

The test contains thirty-three questions designed to measure knowledge of America's founding principles, political history, international relations, and market economy.

The results reveal that Americans are alarmingly uninformed about our Constitution, the basic functions of our government, the key texts of our national history, and economic principles.

- Only 21 percent know that the phrase "government of the people, by the people, for the people" comes from Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.
- Although Congress has voted twice in the last eight years to approve foreign wars, only 53 percent know that the power to declare war belongs to Congress. Almost 40 percent incorrectly believe it belongs to the president.
- Only 55 percent know that Congress shares authority over U.S. foreign policy with the president. Almost a quarter incorrectly believe Congress shares this power with the United Nations.
- Only 27 percent know the Bill of Rights expressly prohibits establishing an official religion for the United States.
- Less than one in five know that the phrase "a wall of separation" between church and state comes from a letter by Thomas Jefferson. Almost half incorrectly believe it can be found in the Constitution.

Americans from all age groups, income brackets, and political ideologies fail the test of civic literacy.

- Americans age 25 to 34 score an average of 46 percent on the exam; Americans age 65 and over score 46 percent.
- Americans earning an annual income between \$30,000 and \$50,000 score an average of 46 percent; Americans earning over \$100,000 score 55 percent.
- Liberals score an average of 49 percent; conservatives score 48 percent.
- Americans who go to church once a week score an average of 48 percent; Americans who never go to church score 50 percent.

Among the 2,508 respondents, 164 say they have been elected to a government office at least once. This subsample of officeholders yields a startling result: elected officials score lower than the general public. Those who have held elective office earn an average score of 44 percent on the civic literacy test—five percentage points lower than

the average score of 49 percent for non-elected participants.

It would be most interesting to explore whether this statistically significant result is maintained across larger samples of elected officials.

The elected officeholders come from the ranks of Democrats (40 percent), Republicans (31 percent), Independents (21 percent), and those who say they belong to no party or indicate no affiliation (8 percent). None were asked to specify what office they held, so the proportion in which they held local, state, or federal positions is unknown.

Not all officeholders do poorly, of course. Some elected officials rank among the highest scorers. But the failure rate on the test among those

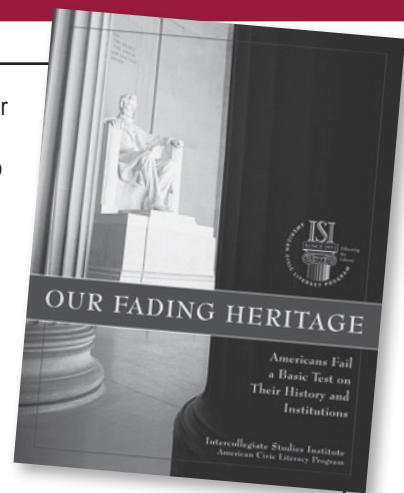
who have won public office is higher (74 percent) than among those who have not (71 percent). Officeholders scored lower on all subthemes of the test: political history, cultural institutions, foreign relations, and market economy.

In each of the following areas, for example, officeholders do more poorly than non-officeholders:

- Seventy-nine percent of those who have been elected do not know the Bill of Rights expressly prohibits establishing an official religion for the U.S.
- Thirty percent do not know that "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" are the inalienable rights referred to in the Declaration of Independence.
- Twenty-seven percent cannot name even one right or freedom guaranteed by the First Amendment.
- Forty-three percent do not know what the Electoral College does. One in five thinks it either "trains those aspiring for higher political office" or "was established to supervise the first televised presidential debates."
- Fifty-four percent do not know the Constitution gives Congress the power to declare war. Thirty-nine percent think that power belongs to the president, and 10 percent think it belongs to the Joint Chiefs of Staff.
- Only 32 percent can properly define the free enterprise system, and only 41 percent can identify business profit as "revenue minus expenses."

On some questions, Americans who have held elected office do better than Americans who have not. They are a little more likely, for example, to recognize the language of the Gettysburg Address (23 percent to 21 percent). Officeholders and non-officeholders find it equally difficult to identify the three branches of government. Only 49 percent of each group can name the legislative, executive, and judicial. ■

Excerpted from Our Fading Heritage. To take the test yourself, visit www.americancivilliteracy.org



★
Americans from all age groups, income brackets, and political ideologies fail the test of civic literacy.
★



Massachusetts Voc Ed Raises the Bar

Is there any education miracle that Massachusetts didn't perform over the past ten years? Here's another one: reinventing vocational education, public schools' oft forgotten and woefully downtrodden wayward cousin. But this ain't your grandpa's voc ed. Prodded by a slew of reforms, including the Bay State's high school graduation test and pressure from No Child Left Behind, Massachusetts' voc schools have risen to the challenge.

"We do very well because of ed reform," explained Rogerio Ramos, principal of Diman Regional Vocational High School, where 60 percent of students typically go to college.

Once known as schools for dummies, Massachusetts' voc schools have given a whole new meaning to interdisciplinary learning. Instead of the soggy drivel this phrase usually implies, the interdisciplinary part has meant bolstering the traditional technical-vocational curriculum with more reading, writing, math, and other core content.

MA Voc Ed High Schools

High Schools That Work (HSTW), an initiative of the Massachusetts' Southern Regional Education Board, is the nation's first large-scale effort to combine challenging academic courses and modern career technical studies to raise the achievement of high school students. It began in 1987 with 28 sites in 13 states. There are now more than 1,300 sites in 31 states.

Key practices of High Schools That Work include:

- Setting higher expectations and getting career-bound students to meet them
- Increasing access to challenging vocational technical studies
- Academic studies that teach the essential content from the college pre-

paratory curriculum through functional and applied strategies

- A program of study that includes an upgraded academic core and a career major
- A structured system of work-based and school-based learning
- An organizational structure and schedule that allow academic and vocational technical teachers to work together
- Each student actively engaged in the learning process
- Involving each student and his/her parent(s) in career guidance and an individualized advising system
- A structured system of extra help
- Keeping score by using student assessment and program evaluation data for continuous improvement

With these key practices, Massachusetts schools are using opportunities like shop class to raise the bar, rather than bend it. ■

Source—The Education Gadfly, a publication from the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, www.edexcellence.net/gadfly.

Unions May Find Relief

U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Labor-Management Standards (OLMS) enforces laws against "embezzlement from labor organizations, extortionate picketing, deprivation of union members' rights by force or violence, and fraud in union officer elections." During the two terms of the Bush administration, OLMS brought 1,004 indictments, resulting in 929 convictions, and payments or orders of restitution totaling more than \$93 million.

President Obama's priorities most likely will not include union misdeeds, so we can expect OLMS and its mission to fall into neglect for the foreseeable future.

Source—The Education Intelligence Agency, www.eiaonline.com.

AMERICORPS FOR MUSICIANS

MusicianCorps, an AmeriCorps-like effort to place trained musicians into schools, appears to be striking a chord with the Obama administration and other national leaders. The brainchild of Kiff Gallagher who helped create AmeriCorps back in the 1990s and who also served as an adviser to the Obama campaign, the program gives young graduates with music performance degrees a chance to teach in schools and after-school programs in low-income communities.

Gallagher's group recently received \$500,000 from the Hewlett Foundation to pilot the program in the San Francisco Bay Area. And it has been saluted by various leaders including former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee.

Like AmeriCorps, MusicianCorps would offer musicians health care and a living stipend in exchange for a year or two of public service. But the salary is little more than volunteer scale. Unlike Teach For America, there's no attempt as yet by the organization to have these young musicians qualify for a starting teacher's salary.



Louisiana Passes Rules Implementing Academic Freedom Act

The Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) recently voted unanimously to adopt rules implementing the Louisiana Science Education Act (LSEA), the controversial academic freedom bill passed and was signed into law by Governor Bobby Jindal last summer.



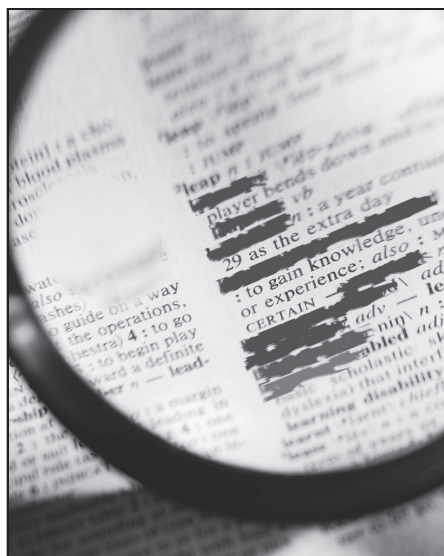
LA Gov. Bobby Jindal

According to *The Times Picayune*, during the deliberations, Democratic State Senator Ben Nevers, a sponsor of the bill, said: “There is no language in here submitted by some secret agent trying to teach religion in public schools.”

The Act states its intention “to create and foster an environment within public elementary and secondary schools that promotes critical thinking skills, logical analysis, and open and objective discussion of scientific theories being studied including, but not limited to, evolution, the origins of life, global warming, and human cloning.”

The rules approved by the BESE effectuate the academic freedom bill’s purpose to allow teachers to use supplementary materials to teach scientific theories without threat of recrimination.

A subcommittee of the Board removed a provision prohibiting “intelligent design” before passing the rules unanimously. The provision went beyond the intent of the legislation and was dropped after the subcommittee meeting. ■



THE TRIUMPH OF IDEOLOGY

Questionable Changes in the Oxford Dictionary

Lisa Saunders of County Down in Northern Ireland has four children, ages 7 to 14. As you might expect, she has plenty of experience helping them with their homework. But nothing in her experience prepared her what she recently discovered while helping her son.

When she consulted the 2007 edition of the *Oxford Junior Dictionary*, she was surprised that the words

“moss” and “fern” were no longer in the dictionary. That made her curious about what else had been omitted. So she compared the 2007 edition to the six previous editions and what she found “horrified” her.

Gone were words like “coronation,” “willow,” and “goldfish.” In their place were words like “MP3 player,” “blog,” and “biodegradable.”

Not surprisingly, words reflecting Britain’s Christian heritage were especially hard hit: “abbey, altar, bishop, chapel, disciple, monk, nun, pew, saint,” and “sin” were all axed. Even Christmas took a hit: “carol,” “holly,” and “mistletoe” were removed. In their place, kids got “tolerant,” “interdependent,” and “bilingual.”

Saunders is concerned that eliminating “so many words associated with Christianity will have a big effect on the numerous primary schools who use it.”

That’s exactly the idea. The head of the children’s dictionary at Oxford University Press admitted as much. She said that “the environment has changed.” “We are also much more multicultural,” she added. And she said that “people don’t go to Church as often as before” and “our understanding of religion is within multiculturalism.”

In other words, we judge our religion by our ideology—in this case, multiculturalism—not vice-versa.

What Oxford University Press sees as changing with the times, others see as discarding Britain’s cultural and religious heritage. As one Buckingham University official put it, “[Britain has] a certain Christian narrative which has given meaning to us over the last 2,000 years. To say it is all relative and replaceable is questionable.”

What masters the Brits are of understatement.

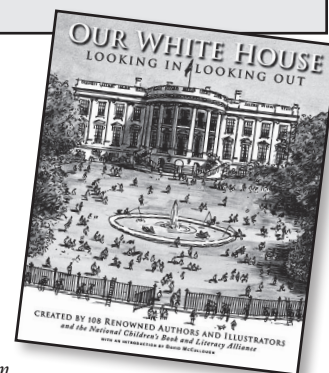
Source—Chuck Colson, *Breakpoint Radio Broadcast*

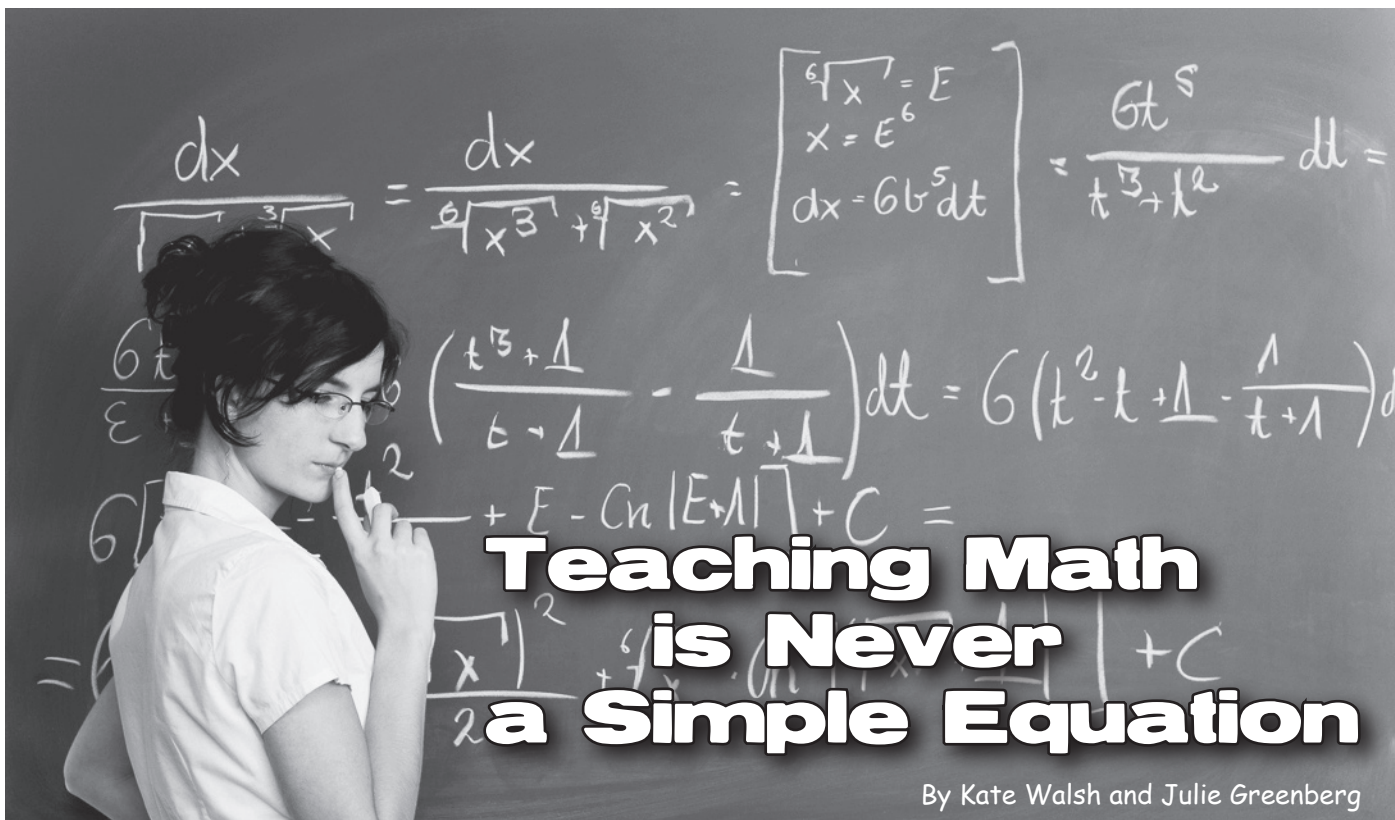
New teaching resource about the White House

Since chosen as the site for the president’s residence in 1792, 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue has seen more than its share of history. Now, an unprecedented anthology presents a dynamic view of more than 200 years of American history—as seen through the White House windows.

Our White House: Looking In, Looking Out is a treasury of essays, short stories, illustrations, presidential letters, speeches, comics, and personal reflections that has been more than eight years in the making, with contributions from over 100 renowned authors and illustrators.

For more information about *Our White House: Looking In, Looking Out*, visit the Candlewick Press, www.candlewick.com.





By Kate Walsh and Julie Greenberg

How many of us have tried to help a young child who has been wrestling with a math problem—only to find that we struggle as well? We diffuse our own discomfort and the child’s misery by pointing to the light at the end of the tunnel: “Once you’re done with school, you won’t ever have to think about another math problem!” We are a nation of math phobics, passing on our weakness and fear of mathematics from one generation to the next.

NCTQ issued a report entitled “No Common Denominator: The Preparation of Elementary Teachers in Mathematics by America’s Education Schools” on the quality of the mathematics preparation that elementary teachers receive from our nation’s colleges and universities. Of utmost concern is the need to tackle the root causes of that which threatens this nation’s global competitiveness. We must set straight our rocky relationship with mathematics, demonstrated in such stark terms by our students’ poor showing on international mathematics tests and expanding shortages of American-born engineers.

Just a few decades ago, our collective phobia of math didn’t much matter. In the era of globalization, it matters a lot.

If we are to correct our course, we must start where mathematics starts: in elementary school. Though part of the job description of an elementary teacher requires the teaching of mathematics, most will generally admit to being “no good at it” and, generally speaking, they appear

Some aspiring teachers complete their undergraduate degrees with not a single mathematics course.

to be right. Elementary teachers perform well below the average college graduate and almost all other teachers except for special education on the SAT math test.

For this study, we carefully analyzed the required mathematics coursework and textbooks used in seventy-seven representative education schools in every state except Alaska. The results are dismaying and go a long way towards explaining why American students end up performing so poorly.

First, when it comes to knowledge of

mathematics, most of these education schools let just about anyone in. Nearly one out of six schools in our sample admits wannabe teachers without ever asking if they can successfully do grade school arithmetic. Most of the rest aren’t much better, testing only to verify that the applicant knows the mathematics we all should have learned in middle school.

What’s even more problematic is what doesn’t happen during the four years of college. The exit tests, essentially the tests administered by states to award a teaching license, assess virtually the same mathematics used on the admissions tests. In other words, the mathematics knowledge needed to get out is little more than the mathematics knowledge needed to get in.

In between these low entry and exit standards is a hodgepodge. The nation’s 1,200 some education schools act as free agents, in marked comparison to the carefully orchestrated programs of study in other developed nations. Some aspiring teachers complete their undergraduate degrees with not a single mathematics course, others up to six. Some schools require courses intended only to tame math phobia. Others are happy to let teacher candidates pick any math course depend-

ing on what tickles their fancy. Only one in eight schools in our study, led by an exemplary program at the University of Georgia, actually require the coursework that elementary teachers will need.

We can only conclude that many teacher educators and state policymakers think that it doesn't much matter what math training elementary teachers receive, under the errant assumption that the only knowledge needed to teach second grade arithmetic is third grade arithmetic.

What preparation is needed?

With remarkable consensus, mathematicians and mathematics educators believe that elementary teaching candidates need a rigorous program of study that immerses them in the topics encountered in elementary and middle grades, but which is by no means remedial.

How does a college course deal with fractions without merely repeating fourth grade math? Children usually only ac-

quire a procedural understanding of fractions, such as the need to invert a fraction divisor and make it a multiplier. Adults who teach them need a deeper, conceptual understanding of fractions so that, among other things, they can use fraction models to really teach concepts rather than the rules that provide progressively weaker support as students encounter more abstract mathematics.

Needed reforms within grasp

There are only three things needed: 1) mathematics standards for students and aspiring teachers that truly are world class; 2) higher admission standards into education schools to ensure that only individuals who have a high school level of math knowledge are admitted; and 3) the creation of new state licensing tests for elementary teachers in mathematics that would essentially force institutions preparing teachers to get it right.

Only then can we look forward to the

day when more American school children may recognize mathematics for the unique opportunities that it provides, not only for their own futures but also our country's as well. ■



Kate Walsh is president of the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ). Ms. Walsh was recently appointed by Governor Martin O'Malley to the Maryland State School Board.



Julie Greenberg is Senior Policy Director for NCTQ. She taught secondary math for 13 years in Montgomery County (MD) schools before joining NCTQ.

More Likely to be Famous than to Use Math

One in five students think they're more likely to be professional athletes or performers than to get good grades in math

A new survey commissioned by Nintendo of kids ages 9-14 and their parents finds that one area in particular needs attention from parents and kids: math. More than any other subject, kids say that they struggle the most with math. Thirty-four percent of kids feel that math is their hardest subject versus a quarter (25 percent) for social studies, 21 percent for English, and 15 percent for science.

As kids get older, it's sometimes hard for them to see eye-to-eye with mom and dad, but not when it comes to math. Thirty-four percent of parents picked math as their child's hardest subject, versus English (27 percent), social studies (15 percent), and science (10 percent).

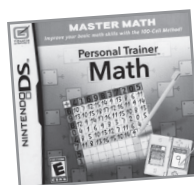
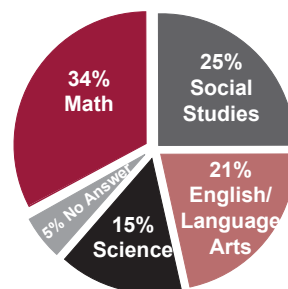
Thirty-one percent of kids have extremely negative feelings about math. When asked to describe their feelings about math, 18 percent say that it's "boring" and thirteen percent actually call it "torture."

Some kids can hardly imagine a world in which they're good at math. Amazingly, 22 percent of kids think that

they're more likely to grow up to become a professional athlete or an actress or singer, than they are to get all As and Bs in math next year. Twenty-one percent of kids think that they're more likely to be famous when they grow up than they are to use math as adults – meaning that kids think they're more likely to be the next Miley Cyrus or LeBron James than to use addition or subtraction at the supermarket. But parents know better.

When they were children, 19 percent of parents thought that they were more likely to grow up to become famous than they were to grow up and use math every day. However, 86 percent of parents say that math is important in their careers. This, despite the fact that 52 percent of parents say that when they were kids, they thought that they'd never need the math that they learned in school. ■

Which is your hardest school subject?



The Nintendo Personal Trainer: Math survey was conducted by Wakefield Research via telephone interviewing. For a look at the Nintendo Personal Trainer: Math, go to www.nintendo.com/games.

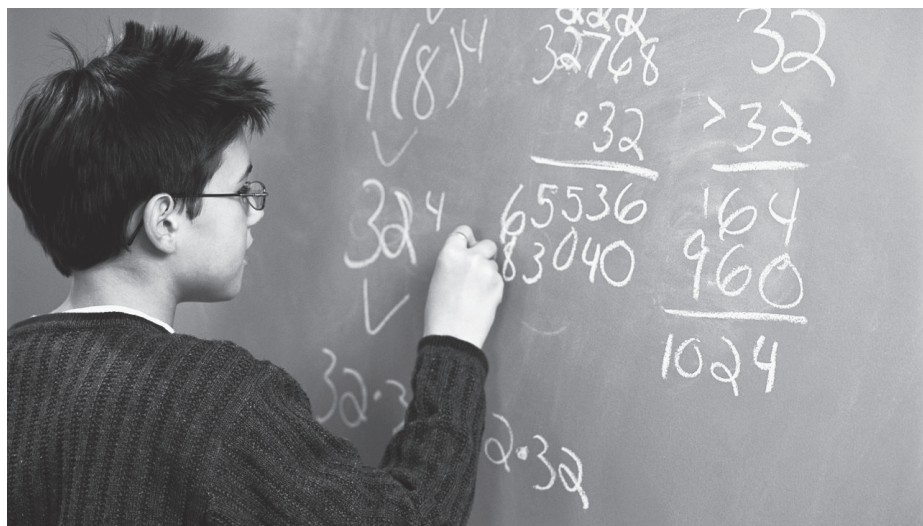
Taking a Cue from a Homeschooler

Times tables: the key to your students' success?

When did you lose interest in math? Never had any? Maybe, but Eugenia Francis knows exactly when it started to happen to her son. The moment? The dread rite of passage all children face: the multiplication tables.

As her son struggled with endless drills, Francis realized there had to be a better way. Why not learn the tables in context of one another and emphasize the commutative property (i.e. 4×6 is the same as 6×4) of the multiplication tables? Francis drew a grid for tables 1-10 and discovered patterns for her son to decode. The mysteries of the times tables unfolded as a daily exploration of "magic" never discussed in his third-grade class. Their fridge eventually was papered with patterns that made the times tables intriguing. "Patterns made my son smile," Francis says. "He could see the structure and knew he got it right."

Ever the creative educator, Francis taught college English. "Patterns whether in literature or math," she says, "reveal the underlying structure. There is an inherent simplicity in them, an inherent beauty. Math should engage your child's imagination." At the kitchen table, Francis applied her skills to math. Why not learn the tables in order of difficulty? Tables 2, 4, 6 and 8 are easy to learn as they end in some combination of 2-4-6-8-0. Tables for odd numbers also have distinct patterns. Why not a more creative approach? Thus was born *Teach Your Child the Multiplication Tables, Fun, Fast and Easy with Dazzling Patterns, Grids and Tricks!* (available on



Amazon and www.teaChildMath.com).

Patterns appeal to children. Learning to recognize patterns teaches analytical skills. A review in *California Homeschool News* stated: "My daughter thinks it's lots of fun. She's already had quite a few 'ah-ha' moments as she recognizes and predicts the various patterns." Patterns enhance recall. "Children with ADHD, dyslexia, and autism do well with my method," Francis says.

Parents and teachers must ensure children learn the multiplication tables. "Without them a child is doomed," Francis states. A child who has not mastered the times tables has difficulty succeeding in mathematics beyond the third grade.

A recent editorial in the *Los Angeles Times* noted that failure to pass Algebra I was the "single biggest obstacle to high school graduation" and that failure to master the multiplication tables was one of the main reasons. A survey of California Algebra I teachers report that 30 percent of their students do not know the multiplication tables. It is hardly surprising then that fifteen-year-olds in the U.S. rank near the bottom of industrialized nations in math skills.

"We have one of the highest high school

dropout rates in the industrialized world," Bill Gates stated. "If we keep the system as it is, millions of children will never get a chance to fulfill their promise because of their Zip Code, their skin color, or their parents' income. That is offensive to our values."

Teachers must innovate and bring the magic of math into the classroom. Parents must do their part. "Parents have a huge influence over a third or fourth grader," Francis states. "By high school it may be too late. Why not take the opportunity that teaching the multiplication tables provides to give your child a head start in math and develop analytical skills necessary for algebra? Mastery of the multiplication tables is essential to your child's future."

Francis published her innovative workbook to help other families. "If more of us would do for other people's children what we do for our own, the world would be a better place." ■

Eugenia Francis taught English at the University of California at Irvine. Faced with the challenge of teaching her son the multiplication tables, she developed her own innovative method, discovering patterns to the multiplication tables.



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