The Muckraker

My Education Philosophy

After serving over 40 years in all of the trenches of education what is evident is that there are a number of cancerous tumors in the system that make the issues and problems confusing and complex to alleviate or cure. The most serious is the use of generalized statistics that distort the reality of educational outcomes unless they are disaggregated by gender, race, age and location. For example, there is a constant drumbeat to reduce class size; yet, it has been reduced from 28 to 15. However, walking through any elementary school building will not find this average in the typical classroom with city school. classrooms being larger than suburban schools. At the high school level, class size ranges anywhere from six to thirty and beyond. All it indicates is that more staff has been added, but not just teacher staff. In other words, it provides a vastly distorted picture of the typical classroom size because there is no such thing; nevertheless, the class size drumbeat continues to beat.

Another cancer is the use of symptoms too often used as causes that hide the real truths. For example, the epicenter of the sad condition of education is located in about 800 districts (mostly inner city) out of 15,000, and, as a result, socio-economic conditions (poverty, housing, dysfunctional families, discrimination, etc.) are given as causes of educational failings when they are only contributing conditions to consider. So why should the rest of the parents, educators, taxpayers and policymakers in the remaining districts be concerned? Because the results and consequences from the 800 impact all communities spreading like a virus everywhere because it's in these districts with failing schools that cultivate the school to prison pipeline that results in dropouts. These dropouts then make up to 80% of prison inmates, but the crimes they commit occur in every district not just the 800.. Worse yet is that five years after being released from their sentence, they return back to their prison cells after committing more crimes—misdemeanors to felonies. Who are these inmates? Primarily minority boys and that is why there is so little discussion about it because it would cause cries and claims of discrimination.

A growing and shameful cancer is that education is now infused with politics to such a degree that too many decisions are being made for political reasons (primarily because of federal involvement that does not have a Constitutional basis) rather than what is in the best interests of children, and the School-to- Prison Pipeline is just one. For example, possible candidates for Secretary of Education have included the presidents of the two teacher unions; it would be like putting the rooster in the henhouse because they are opposed to charter schools that are hugely successful with minority students ("***Charter Schools Show Steeper Upward Trend in Student Achievement than District Schools***: ***First nationwide study of trends shows large gains for African Americans at charters,"*** (Shakeel and Peterson), Education Next, Fall 2020). Their biases would certainly influence the state of charters affecting mostly minority students, as well as, keeping the status quo of public education and failing schools to continue. Furthermore and vastly more important is that they advocate for teacher adult employment not for the needs of children. The fact that their names surfaced is a prime example of politics first not students who would appear lower on the list of educational priorities.

A cancer that erupts from time to time, mostly at the local level and then goes into remission for periods, is *"censorship"* that also has political overtones that reach the Supreme Court. Moreover, it is an indication of how fragile our society has become because it too often reflects individual or group "hurts"—something they find objectionable. Obviously, it is a very contentious and emotional issue. The problem is that there is a wrong that schools can be all things to all people and students—the sheer numbers (over 50 million) involved makes it impossible. That is why there are private and parochial school options, except parents have to pay tuition in addition to their tax bills when public education is free. The only free option is homeschooling that was steadily increasing, but that's now exploding because of COVID.

A current censorship case involves an elementary student in Mississippi who went to school with her mask, but on it was *"Jesus Loves Me"* that the principal removed and replaced with a plain mask because "*it violated school policy."* The problem that has instigated a lawsuit is that no such school policy existed. Furthermore, other children had masks with *"Black Lives Matter,"* but their masks were not removed. (***Classroom Busybodies Ban a 'Jesus loves me Mask'*** National Review, 11/13/2020): This is certainly an indication of hostility to religion that has prompted other lawsuits in the past particularly around Christmas school celebrations and the various symbols it represents even a tree.

Making the issue more controversial and difficult is that **"***censorship*" is not easy to define. According to Webster's Dictionary it means *"to examine in order to suppress or delete anything considered objectionable. Its central characteristic is the suppression of an idea or image because it offends or disturbs someone, or because they disagree with it."* It often involves social issues, and in school it's commonly directed at so-called "controversial" materials (National Coalition Against Censorship).

Needless to say, most censorship efforts come from parents who disapprove of language or ideas that differ from or affront their personal views and values, but demands can emerge from anywhere across the religious, ideological, and political spectrum making the topics limitless with many efforts motivated by anxiety about changing social conditions and traditions that now include displays, social media posts, reading lists and programs.

The core issue of "censorship" is where does it end? The reality is that among parents there will always be one or more finding something the school does "objectionable;" therefore, there is no end. It becomes a cancer that cannot be cured unless schools can be consistently and totally neutral in all things it does; again, impossible to achieve to satisfy all. It's issues like this that distract schools from their academic mission and far more pressing academic problems such as the inability to teach reading at proficient levels to two-thirds of boys even after 9 years when students must attend school.

Also among the cancers is a tumor very hard to find because it is hidden, but is a very significant factor in the deplorable state of education of boys known as *misandry*--*the hatred or dislike of men or boys* (primarily by feminists and feminist teachers that helps to explain the boy problem in schools).

The national, statewide, and local public debate about education does not provide these and numerous other educational issues with insightful and useful information for the education consumer. Yes, there are education news stories at times, but not honest and realistic analysis of the facts; instead, they are infused with blame and ideological agendas. The problem is that the media does not give "education" a priority in investigative reporting. For example, try to find a regular education column in any newspaper or see a regular educational segment on any TV news program; if anything, "sports" command pages of information down to the most minute facts, and it gets more air time. In fact, try to find an educational columnist.

Yet, "*The Shame of The Nation Is Its Schools*," sums up the perception of public education in America. Is this perception justified? Needless to say there are those who will agree wholeheartedly with the perception, there are those who will vehemently disagree, and there are those who are confused and unsure as to just what is the condition of education at all levels.

What is abundantly clear is that the debate has been raging on for the past six decades—actually much longer--and it's intensifying. In other words, public schools in particular have been and continue to be under siege with its supporters and critics in unyielding combat. Yet, the attempts to prescribe remedies, although plentiful, have not provided any cures to alleviate the fever of debate or to find meaningful, effective, and lasting solutions.

There is an underlying cause and, unfortunately, the prescriptions have dealt with the symptoms only. What the debate has failed to root out of all the rhetoric is that "educating" has changed, but "education" has not changed on any scale. "Educating" is what needs to be taught (curriculum—imparting knowledge through formal instruction) to pass on the necessary knowledge and basic skills needed for students to become contributing members of the society in order to not only ensure its survival, but also to improve it. "Education" is the structure and system (created to deliver the learning process)—a system that has fundamentally not changed; the reality is that 90% of students attend the same structural public school system.

Oh yes, there have been numerous "reforms" of one type or another all of which had a lofty and noble purpose (best effort) to improve education. The reality is that none of them have produced any significant improvements. Even the reformers are in agreement that the reforms attempted have not substantially changed or altered the direction or outcomes of public education. What has been practiced in profusion is tampering and tinkering with the system by politicians, policymakers, and professionals.

There is another extremely important factor that is overlooked and ignored. No one can deny, or should deny, that public education was instrumental in "democratizing" the nation by assimilating the vast number of immigrants into the "melting pot" of the American society particularly in earlier part of the 20th century. It was successful in fulfilling a rather clear purpose--to provide the basic skills and knowledge necessary for obtaining a job or further education that helped to create a common societal bond for a growing and pluralistic society.

It was a successful effort--an incredibly successful effort! What followed after WWII was vast number of veterans who returned and started college prompted by the GI Bill of Rights; now it's being propelled by the *College and Career Readiness* agenda promoted by high school educators (college attendance is considered one of the most important indicators of successful school systems). However, essentially, the "career readiness" has to do with college careers only rather than those found previously in the vocational high schools that have become virtually extinct. This demand for college has created an absolutely insane increase in tuition and fees that exceed $50,000 and more per year to attend what many colleges known as *party schools* with an infinite potpourri of enticing amenities like climbing walls, etc.

What is absent from the numbers who get accepted to college is the actual percentage who show up in September (never stated in any school data); in fact, 20% (white) to 40% (minority) fail to enter the college doors. Furthermore, more than 50% drop out, and it's now taking 6 years to graduate from many four year programs. In addition, a college degree does not automatically mean getting a job commensurate with the degree with 10-15% and more earning a living as a taxi cab driver, and its estimated that almost half of college graduates are employed in jobs that do not require a degree (my next book will be on *The College Myth and Chaos*.)

As with all governmental and societal best efforts, the success evolved to excesses--expanding state and federal bureaucracies, governmental interventions, legislative regulations, and judicial interference caused by a desire to make the schools the arbiter and pacifier of all societal ills. These and other excesses imposed upon the schools additional agendas that have politicized, pulverized, and bastardized education and educating.

At the same time, the education "profession" surfaced to assert its role to manage and control "educating" and "education." Unionization, legislation, and even local policies enabled the profession to "professionalize" the school system; with it came the excesses of bureaucracy, regulations, union agendas, and a fierce effort to protect its "turf." This has taken precedence over the first priority of schools which are the children. In reality, the first priority of the schools, as explained by some writers "*is to serve as warehouses for adult employment*."

What also began to emerge, but more slowly, was the corporate agenda because graduating students were not seen as being equipped with the basic skills required for the informational and technological revolution. If there was excess from this effort, it was more in the arena of politically influencing legislation, as well as, a host of studies and surveys to document the poor job the schools were doing.

Another cultural change also began to limb along--providing children with protections and rights. However, it has accelerated with legislative lunacy and jaundiced judicial decisions which have crossed the boundary of success to excess (best efforts without being effective): children can divorce from parents, become emancipated, and not be subjected to developmental discipline by parents or teachers for misbehaviors.

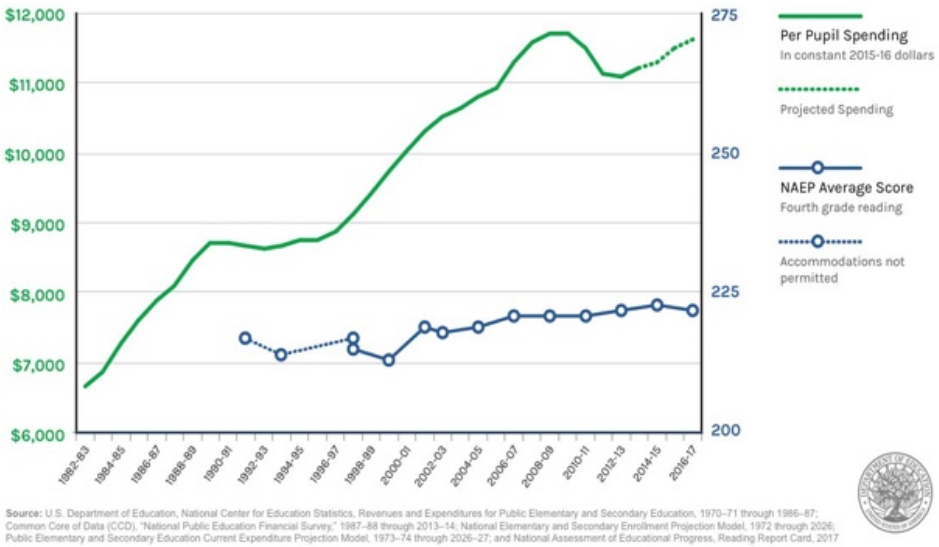
Coupled with these agendas has been the onset of overprotective parenting to shield offspring from any hurts or disappointments, and it's the prime reason that playgrounds are being eliminated because "accidents" are now causes for lawsuits based on negligence. In turn, it has led schools to follow the same agenda to eliminate any activities that allow individual students to be recognized for achievements of any kind because it would make other students feel inadequate or inferior—hurtful. Eliminating failing grades, valedictorians, honor rolls, lowering standards, etc. are the indicators of bubble-wrapping children to make them all feel equal and protected. As a result, this shield of protection has made, and is making, children very fragile and sensitive to interactions with other students, friends and even adults. Furthermore, it does not stop at the K-12 level because it extends to college life as well.

The effect of "helicopter parenting" is largely responsible for the lack of coping skills (to deal successfully with a difficult situation), and resiliency (the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties). These are skills learned by dealing with the trials and tribulations of life that everyone encounters; being protected from such experiences is harmful rather than helpful.

The full shock wave of these distresses is causing a significant mental health problem in the schools and colleges resulting in a sharp increase in drug usage, eating disorders, chronic absences, and attempted and successful suicides. The fact is that schools and colleges cannot provide enough mental health assistance to keep up with the increasing demand.

It is also seen in the classrooms where teachers now describe the environment as *"discipline chaos"* because "discipline" is too often seen as "discriminatory." The reform effort is now centered around "restorative justice" that has led to a reduction or even elimination of suspensions; unfortunately, it has not reduced the misbehaviors because all discipline encounters are simply not reported. The consequences of these distresses certainly help, in my opinion, to explain the increase in school shootings that started with the massacre at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado in April of 1999 because the one common ingredient in everyone is "anger" of some sort. And it becomes even more evident in the security precautions schools have been forced to implement that continues unabated to make schools "fortresses."

Then, to make matters much worse was the advent of COVID-19 that has shuttered thousands of classrooms resulting in the proliferation of online education on a scale never imagined. The major prediction from its impact is that there will be a loss of learning; of course there will be. But what is not explained is that all of the lost learning is not necessary for academic success. For example, children being schooled at home do not have all of the education excess (optional learning activities not needed to meet graduation requirements) found in public schools. The key two academic skills needed are reading and arithmetic, and judging by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (the nation's report card) results have been flat for decades, they were not even in good shape under the best of conditions. It is illustrated in the following chart from the U.S. Dept of Education, Center for Educational Statistics, comparing spending and test scores.:



Prior to COVID, the students at or above the proficiency level in reading grades 4, 8, and 12 were 35%, 34% and 37% respectively, and math 41%, 34% and 24%; in other words only about one third have been proficient or higher. Further, more spending and staffing has not resulted in better test outcomes since 1980. This is the test that will be administered after COVID that will determine learning loss since it also includes civics, economics (gr.12), geography, science, U.S. history, technology & engineering literacy (GR. 8) and writing. It is far more reliable than state and local testing that too often have been manipulated to show higher results, or where standards have been lowered to achieve similar results.

Most profoundly, the society then turned from one of orthodox values born out of the depression, global wars, and religious beliefs to one of a valueless--anything goes and anything is acceptable--society. Unbridled rights and freedoms—doing what feels good--became the pathways to a new "pop" and drug culture. Unfortunately the new culture did not build the walls of responsibility around the unbridled rights and freedoms (freedom can only endure with individual responsibility).

There is an inevitable cycle that occurs when excess exceeds the tolerance of society to bear it leading to distress--anger, confusion, conflict and systemic malignancies. Finally, the reaction to the distress drives an agenda for redressing the distress (reforms). Unfortunately, the cycle then begins all over again.

The undeniable fact is that after 50 years of increased funding and staffing, standardized test results remain in limbo; in other words, spending has not propelled increased results. Unfortunately, what is happening now to show improved outcomes is staff manipulation (cheating) of test score results, lowered standards (two-thirds of the states have done so), and retreat from teacher evaluations (again, two--thirds of the states have done so), resulting in an increase in unreported but actual corruption.

The only real solution that I advocate is to establish volunteer community citizen audit committees to monitor school spending and practices to ensure efficiency, effectiveness and economy in the use of the resources provided by the taxpayers. There are a multitude of volunteers available in every community particularly those in the retirement ages who have skills, knowledge and motivation to contribute their wisdom and expertise--many do so now. In addition, I have developed many manuals for such committees to use at no cost. In essence, they would serve as an adjunct to a school board because they can no longer do the job alone (*Tough Choices, Tough Times 2008—no longer up to the responsibility over K-12 education*). Incidentally, no permission is needed to start such a committee.

Although retired, I have not retired from the education discussion and debate spending most mornings troweling the internet reviewing over 200 emails to keep abreast of what is happening in the education trenches. This is evident in my latest book to be released in 2021, *Boys' Academic Pandemic: Can't Read, Can't Learn*—yes, the problem in education is first and foremost a problem with boys compared to girls and shamefully it is Verboten (not to be discussed).

No doubt some columns will be controversial, but every effort will be to ensure that they add credible information to the ongoing discussion about education. What you will find interesting is that from time to time, I will be using some of my past columns of 30 years ago to show that the problems and issues really have not changed very much except for the worse.

The *SchoolInformationSystem* website provides the best single source of educational information, but there are many other sources that I review. What I also plan to do is to add my analysis to appropriate articles and make it part of the columns.

All and more will be explained in the articles that will follow beginning with the topic of Reading that has received considerable attention in previous articles. It will be a six part series, *The Reading Rat Race*.

- Part I—Is There A Best Way to Teach Reading?
- Part II—Is The Reading Debate Masking The Real Problems?
- Part III—Why Was CT Crowned The Reading Champ?
- Part IV—Cacophony (a mishmash) of Reading Instruction!
- Part V—Where Is Reading Now?
- Part VI—Lawsuit Nightmare!

Comments and reactions are encouraged at fusco.a@comcast.net.

An Urban Fairy Tale:
The Deluder Satan Masters.

Once upon a time many, many years ago in a nation called HOPE there roamed a really bad dud called Satan who was constantly on the prowl to capture the souls of all those who were willing to join his kingdom of moral decadence. However, in order to protect the white children of HOPE from being tempted by HIS promises of eternal happiness, a "ye olde deluder Satan" law was passed requiring the establishment of public schools to have the children become literate by teaching them reading, writing and the Bible so that illiteracy could not be used by Satan's forked tongue, spear in hand and ready to use, to pierce their moral being.

Alas, denying Satan from capturing the souls of literate children did not deny his Satanic quest to expand his kingdom of greed and power for soon there would be children of color who would be held in bondage by witches disguised as "Plantation Masters" so that they could enhance their own mansions with riches and power. Out of necessity they would provide for their basic welfare, but would keep them illiterate; **illiteracy is the weapon of choice to control, coerce, and maintain bondage—chains are not needed to reel in the victims and manage their moral and physical beings.**

However, many generations later laws were passed to allow children of color to read and write by attending public schools and eventually they were even allowed to mingle with the white children. But it was more fairy tale than reality because to this day half of them do not graduate; instead, they are pushed-out and then drop-out out of school; sadly, they are mostly boys of color. Even those who graduate, many have limited literacy skills referred to as the achievement gap with the white children.

Among these children was R.V. Winkle Wish—a dreamer-- who was constantly wishing for all children to have success. One day, he was in such deep thought that he fell asleep. When he awoke, he rubbed his eyes, stretched his arms, and he saw that he had a long white beard. Only then did he realize that he slept for 200 years. As he looked around him, he was astonished at what he saw—horseless carriages, phones with no wires, a strange looking machine with a keyboard and a screen that navigated

the world. Such wonders he thought would mean that schools would be different and so he visited his old school. However, he was bewildered to see that much had not changed in the inner cities: the buildings were more tired and old and the classrooms were about the same, but he did notice one change: the blackboards were now green, some were even white, and there were rooms equipped with the strange looking machines that sat silently on the desks.

He had hoped that all the years he had slept and the life changes he did see that the plight of children of color would be resolved. He soon realized that the "plantation privateers" had changed to a gentry of new urban "deluder masters" (say one thing and mean another) of educators, politicians and policymakers clothed in Satan's fiery red cap used to blind their followers that Satan had stolen their souls. Winkle Wish found that their deluder rhetoric to help children of color become literate adorned the halls of the Capitol of HOPE, the Capitol domes of the states of HOPE, the blackboards of classrooms, and the pages of policymakers' policies that govern the fate of children, was written with "*deceiving hands*." Although, he learned girls of color were doing much better than boys of color.

It was obvious that these "new deluders" did not see the children of color contributing to the future of "HOPE" even though they claimed—with generations of titanic rhetoric--to provide them with hope and opportunity to do so. In reality, these vulnerable children are viewed as pawns to be used in their Satanic kingdom of greed and power. Unfortunately, the knights in shining armor and ready swords needed to fight for the cause of these children by slaying the deluders are rarely found. The few who have tried have had their swords broken and their armor tarnished and shattered from so many battles of hopelessness because the inhabitants of HOPE remain as silent spectators as the games are played out in the Coliseum of Hopelessness.

Satan, of course, reigns proudly and smugly over these new found plantation "deluder masters" now called "unions" and supported by politicians and misguided bureaucrats who have tattered minds and deluder hands to keep as many children of color in illiterate bondage because they derive many benefits from doing so—it adds to their riches of power and greed; otherwise these children could not have been held in such bondage for generations.

Oh, it is not as though there have not been many attempts to reform the failing system for these children; it's just that none have succeeded. An earlier school reform--*Race to the Top*—had a serious flaw because there was no top to reach, and the newest reform, *Every Child Succeed Act (ESSA),* allows schools more flexibility as long as they adhere to 196 pages of regulations. It too is intended to instill hope and opportunity for all children, but is it more "forked tongue rhetoric" since no schools have succeeded in achieving literacy for all by closing the achievement gap between white children and children of color; this must be achieved to provide hope and opportunity. The reality is that the only top to reach is the growing heap of failed reforms on top of which this newest reform will be added.

The primary obstacle to effective and meaningful reforms to provide literacy for all is not only the "deluder unions," but also their allies--the "deluder educators, politicians and policymakers" who have the power to end the bondage but are lacking moral souls to do so. Is it that difficult to have these children become literate by teaching them to read and write after at least 9 years of schooling? Perhaps there needs to be a bonus incentive, but more likely the "deluders" need a moral soul. The problem is that Satan does not give back the souls once provided so willingly by so many deluders.

Of course, stealing souls is not new to Satan. He even tempted the first inhabitants of HOPE—one was called "Honor" and the other "Truth"-- by telling them that if they would not eat a forbidden fruit "they would be as gods" (supreme beings); a lie to be sure, but such lies are meant "to decoy and befool" willing converts on Satan's horns to the depths of hell (a really bad and fiery place) their eventual place of residence from which they cannot escape. Satan's horns are their bondage! Since the new "deluder masters" want to be as gods, and believe too often that they are gods, they succumb to the lie. Unfortunately, they often find that the happiness they were promised (riches and power) with Satan's forked tongue cannot be found in the Satanic tentacles of greed and power; yet, few seem to learn from the tragic and painful experiences of others who became willing victims.

The lesson to be learned from this fairy tale is that literacy--ability to read and write--is the only passport for children of color to develop the skills needed to achieve emancipation from illiterate bondage; and it never appears so brightly as when it is used to oppose Satan's will perpetrated by the

new “deluder Satan masters.” Since the politicians and policymakers are emboldened to the “deluder unions” for their votes, money and influence, they become willing perpetrators who in their sinister and subtle ways ensure that children of color remain in the plague of perpetual bondage and filled with the brutality of false hopes.

Sorrowfully, there is no happy ending to this fairy tale for these fragile and disposable children, mostly boys, who are condemned and destined to failure and forbidden to taste the fruits of opportunity and hope. Why? The new “deluder masters” refuse to understand that the future of HOPE can only be realized if all children have hope, opportunity and literacy. Instead, they help to drive these children into the school-to-prison pipeline and then the culture of drugs and crimes; finally, they are herded onto the road leading to the prison pens because the deluders have no conscience, no moral fiber, and no sense of responsibility—the consequences of soulless beings.

Fairy tales usually end with a prince from among the knights to awaken the multitude from their sleep of complacency and ignorance, but no prince has yet arrived to unshackle these children from illiterate bondage so that they can experience the hope and opportunity they have been promised for so long. Perhaps the prince is on his way and that he has mounted his white horse with magic wand in hand to awaken the sleeping giant from complacency and denial. Hopefully his sturdy stallion called “Emancipator” will not stumble on the way.

Dream on! Then Read On! The fairy tale turns into naked, disgusting, unconscionable, and unbelievable reality that shames the nation of HOPE--where there are too many schools unable to provide literacy success for all children and where too many are dropout factories. The horror that takes place in these schools in the name of “education” should identify them more appropriately as “Zombie Schools.” These Zombie schools exist because the deluders are alive and well and multiply willingly to fill their pockets with riches, their positions with power, and their mouths with deluder rhetoric using the children of color as bait to “become as gods;” they also exist because there are not enough strong voices advocating for these hopeless and helpless children and demanding real change—a very sad commentary on the nation of HOPE.

In their lust to obtain riches and power, the “deluders” neglect to remember that they too will eventually be herded onto the pathway leading to the gates of Satan’s fiery kingdom of hell. When they arrive the promise of “becoming gods” will turn into ashes of dust, and they will arrive with empty pockets, no positions of power, and face eternal pain and punishment so well earned and so well deserved—a fitting tribute to the disposable children who were so easily condemned to failure and prison pens when all that was required was to ensure that they achieved literacy. As the eternal pain and punishment endures a question that the “deluders” need to ponder is: Was it worth it?

Edited Quotes

School Pushouts: A Plague of Hopelessness Perpetrated by Zombie Schools

by

Armand A. Fusco, Ed.D.

The explanations and references are found in the contents of the book.

- *School Pushouts is a time bomb exploding economically and socially every 26 seconds.*
- ***Remember what the basic problem is—they are in all respects illiterate and that is why they are failing.***
- *Every three years the number of dropouts and pushouts adds up to a city bigger than Chicago.*
- *Politics trump the needs of all children to achieve their potential.*
- ***One reason that the high school dropout crisis is known as the "silent epidemic" is that the problem is frequently minimized.***
- ***Simply stated black male students can achieve high outcomes; the tragedy is most states and districts choose not to do so.***
- ***In the majority of schools, the conditions necessary for Black males to systematically succeed in education do not exist.***
- *While one in four American children is Latino--the largest and fastest-growing minority group in the United States—they are chronically underserved by the nation's public schools and have the lowest education attainment levels in the country.*
- ***MISEDUCATION IS THE MOST POWERFUL EXAMPLE OF CRUEL AND UNUSUAL PUNISHMENT; IT'S EXACTED ON CHILDREN INNOCENT OF ANY CRIME.***
- ***Traditional proposals for improving education—more money, smaller classes, etc.—aren't getting the job done.***
- ***The public school system is designed for Black and other minority children to fail.***
- ***The U.S. Department of Education has never even acknowledged the problem exists.***
- ***Though extensive records are kept…unions and school boards do not want productivity analysis done.***
- *Educational bureaucracies like the NEA are at the center of dysfunctional minority public schools.*
- *Does bonus pay alone improve student outcomes? – we found that it does not.*
- *Performance pay is equivalent to "thirty pieces of silver."*
- *Data necessary to distinguish cost effective schools are all available, but our system has been built to make their use difficult.*
- ***Districts give credit for students who fail standardized tests on the expectation that students someday will pass***
- *We saw some schools that were low performing and had a very high parent satisfaction rate*
- ***We're spending ever-greater sums of money yet our high school graduates' test results have been absolutely flat.***
- *America's schools have many problems, but an excess of excellence is not one of them.*
- ***Not only is our use of incarceration highly concentrated among men with little schooling, but corrections systems are doing less to correct the problem by reducing educational opportunities for the growing number of prisoners.***
- *Although states will require districts to implement the common core state standards, the majority of these states are not requiring districts to make complementary changes in curriculum and teacher programs.*
- *We can show that merit pay is counterproductive, that closing down struggling schools (or firing principals) makes no sense.*
- ***The gap between our articulated ideals and our practice is an international embarrassment.***
- *Despite the growing support by minority parents for charters, the NAACP, the National Urban League and other civil-rights groups collectively condemn charter schools*
- *Public schools do respond constructively to competition by raising their achievement and productivity.*
- *Gates Foundation has also stopped funding the small school concept because no results could be shown..*

- ***The policies we are following today are unlikely to improve our schools.***
- *Our country still does a better job of tracking a package than it does a student,*
- ***These children get less of all things research and experience tell us make a difference.***
- *Reformers have little knowledge of what is working and how to scale what works.*
- ***The fact is that illiteracy has persisted in all states for generations, particularly among the most vulnerable children and getting worse is testament that national policy and leadership rings hollow.***
- *We can't change a child's home life, but what we can do is affect what they do at school.*
- *Only a third of young Americans will leave high school with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed*
- *Black churches can no longer play gospel in the sanctuaries while kids drop out into poverty and prison. They must embrace reform and take the role catholic churches have done for so long and for so many.*
- *There is only one way to equalize education for all—technology.*
- *Whatever made you successful in the past won't in the future.*
- *The real potential of tech for improving learning remains largely untapped in schools today.*
- ***Can't read, can't learn, can't get a job, can't survive, so can't stay within the law.***
- ***Of 19.4 million government workers half work in education which rivals health care for the most wasteful sector in America****.*
- ***The only people not being betrayed are those who feed off of our failing education system…that group gets larger every year.***
- *Mediocrity, not excellence, is the norm as demonstrated by the deplorable evidence.*
- ***Parents are left to face the bleak reality that their child will be forever stuck in a failing school and a failing system.***
- *The key is that unless there is accountability, we will never get the right system.*
- ***The public institutions intended for student learning have become focused instead on adult employment.***
- ***The strategies driving the best performing systems are rarely found in the U.S.***
- *No reform has yet lived up to its definition!*
- ***Minority males don't get the beef, they get the leftovers.***

These quotes should send shockwaves and shivers, preferably a tsunami, through the educational and law enforcement establishments, and the State capitol and legislative offices, to act rather than to ignore or deny that the problems exist and offer feeble reforms that have not worked; in fact, none of the reforms have succeeded in achieving their intended goals.

What is really so sad is that it does not require any creativity, studies, or more reforms. All that is required is to copy the success stories to see if they can be duplicated. Since Massachusetts is the #1 school system, it may be prudent to determine how they achieved such an enviable record.

What is very unique about Massachusetts is that they have had to operate their school system under Proposition 2 ½ for the almost half a century. Basically, it limited how much budgets could be increased-literally a spending cap. Apparently, less money yields better results because it has to be spent on "needs"—what you must do, rather than "wants"—what may be nice to do, but not required or affordable.

Using just this one example should help parents and taxpayers understand that what is needed is not more money, but reallocating existing dollars to proven programs that work.

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Topic 1

IS EDUCATION MEDIOCRITY OR MILLENNIUM MIRACLE?

One hundred thousand new teachers to lower class sizes in the nation's schools, millions for computer education in Connecticut, "Ka Ching! Businesses Cashing in on Learning," Vouchers and Charters a Mystery to Most," "Pay-Performance Link in Salaries Gains Momentum,"

Education is a national, state and local concern and one of the most politicized issues of the day. "It's hard to find any American who isn't touched in some way by the public schools as a student, parent, taxpayer, employer, or any combination of the above." Yet, try to find a regular column devoted to education in any newspaper. How is the public expected to understand the meaning and impact of educational issues without information and some analysis and interpretation? Is it better to keep the public ignorant? Not when education impacts every community, every state, the nation as a whole and when billions of tax dollars are involved. And, most important, not when the future of our young people is at stake.

The educational system, with all its faults—and there are many—is too important to be politicized, brutalized, and bastardized by well-meaning bureaucrats and politicians (local, state and federal) who, in too many cases, are busy promoting their own agendas. Most have no concept of the consequences or impact their decisions have; and, worse yet, too many don't even understand the educational system that they are tampering and tinkering with (this is also true of judges who have impaled themselves onto the educational scene).

Unfortunately, the parents of school children will believe just about anything that is peddled to improve education for their children. Yet, it is hard to blame the parents because they have such a passionate desire for wanting the best education; however, they are not as passionate about having an accountable school system which is the public's concern. The fault that does fall on the parents is that facts are resisted if they conflict with emotions or beliefs—in other words, "don't confuse the issues or perceptions with the facts."

What are some of the issues and facts? 1. Issue: More money improves education. Fact: More money does not produce greater or more effective educational results. Example: In the past ten years, 120 billion dollars of federal Title I expenditures have not produced any significant improvement in the achievement of poor and minority children. 2. Issue: Small class size improves academic achievement. Fact: "…reducing class size is an initiative that has not proven its effectiveness" (a recent report by the Education Commission of the States). 3. Issue: Reforms have improved education: Fact: The reformers all agree that "…none of the efforts of which they had been part to improve education generally had had any positive effects."

Controversial and even confusing issues, yes! For example, educational standards are now being touted as a means to raise student achievement. Will it work? What happens to those students who do not

meet the standards? Have school systems that embarked on a no-social-promotion-policy thought through what happens to the students who don't get promoted? One of the six Decatur, Illinois students expelled for violence this past year had been in the same grade for three years.

Probably the most frightening issue that has emerged on the educational scene is school safety. Who would have thought that police presence in schools, metal detectors, identification badges, etc. would be part of the educational environment? Who would have predicted that schools would become fearful fortresses?

The "perceived" shortage of teachers (enough teachers are being prepared but policies and practices have created the need for even more teachers) is a problem that is beginning to plague many school districts, but there is a real shortage of school administrators—a job no longer attractive as a professional career move. What are the reasons for the shortages?

Most schools are in need of major renovations; yet, 100,000 new classrooms will be needed to house the 100,000 new teachers funded by Congress when, in fact, there is a shortage of classrooms just to met increased enrollments. Should the money be used for new teachers or building and renovating schools?

Illegal drugs continue to be a serious problem in the schools; but there is another problem--the promiscuous use of prescription drugs to treat emotional and behavioral problems and boys are the primary victims.

How will solutions be found to these and the endless problems facing education, and how will issues be addressed more realistically when schools have no interest in being quality (superior excellence) organizations?

Oh, yes, they are interested in the rhetoric of excellence; but where are the standards and the indicators of excellence or quality along with the procedures and systems required to achieve needed educational improvements (not just test scores)? Where is the written plan? Seek, and you shall not find it! What you will find is perhaps a school improvement plan rather than a comprehensive quality, strategic plan.

Facts, of course, do not necessarily change beliefs, opinions or perceptions; if education is to be improved, a major effort must be made to teach smart people how to learn—a very difficult task at times. However, the challenge is far greater and it is eloquently expressed in A New Compact for Learning (New York State Department of Education):

"The problem is not that the legions of dedicated people are limited or uncaring The schools are filled with intelligent, conscientious, even idealistic people eager to be effective. The problem is that the system they are in has become obsolete.
For all the changes, around us, the American school today is more as it was in 1900 or 1950 then it is different. And what worked in the 1900's, will not work in the 2000's.
Tinkering with the status quo is not enough. We must change the system so that we may achieve the results we need. And, we are running out of time: Either we will make the changes that a new century and a new era require, or we will sink into mediocrity."

Furthermore, "A cultural change is needed in the ways that we think about schools, not just in how they operate."

But can the changes be made from within the system? Education America faces three primary problems in trying to solve the problems from within: 1. It does not maintain a priority focus because it is crisis-managed. 2. It does not have a sustainable driving force required to implement and maintain quality reforms. 3. It does not possess the structural and procedural discipline necessary to nurture a quality environment.

The fact is that changes are occurring but they are coming from outside forces in the form of charter schools, vouchers, privatization and the boom in home schooling—all of which are deemed as threats to the present monopolistic and politicized educational system. In reality, all of these so-called threats will have a minimal impact on public education.

Does this mean that it is hopeless to expect that Education America can meet the challenges of the new millennium? The failed history of educational reform is not encouraging. What has happened to date are many, many best efforts, but they have not been effective—rhetoric has not become reality.

It can be done! However, it will take courageous and committed school-communities, pedagogic politics, and corporate champions to make it happen. The question now is whether mediocrity will continue to flourish or if the educational system itself can give birth to a millennium miracle

Topic 2

IS VALUE-ADDED EDUCATION VALID OR VENEER?

What is the purpose of schools? Simply stated it is to add value to the "product" (student) and to do it in the most cost effective and efficient manner possible. Oh my, this sounds like a production line for widgets. Students are not widgets, they are human and they cannot all be treated the same; and, unlike a production line, the end results will not be even. True, but it doesn't change the fact that the purpose of schooling is to add value—academic learning (skills and knowledge), social skills (behavior), and attitudes (mental state).

However, is it really possible to measure value-added learning (measuring yearly gains in student achievement rather than making comparisons to national norms). Absolutely! It has been done since 1992 in Tennessee (Tennessee Value Added Assessment System) and "is gaining traction throughout the U.S."

The pioneer in this field is Dr. William Sanders, a Professor of Statistics, at an agricultural school, who has no background in K-12 education—how-about-that! However, "many believe he has developed a system for analyzing test results that tells how well schools and individual teachers are doing their jobs… that's powerful—really explosive--stuff."

The loudest and most ear-piercing excuse educators give as to why schooling isn't more effective is that there are too many variables over which they have no control— home life, poverty, student mobility, etc. Now comes along Dr. Sanders who believes "that the effect of teachers (on learning) overrides family income, and parental involvement." This has to be considered heresy by many professionals. In other words, his system factors out the variables over which educators have no control. It's easy to see why the system is attracting attention (supporters and critics).

Furthermore, research findings using data from the Tennessee system has shown that "race, socioeconomic level, class size, and classroom heterogeneity are poor predictors of student academic growth." So even when educators are in control of a variable such as class size, it does not seem to improve academic performance.

Probably most startling of all is that high, low, and average student achievement groups made gains in all five academic subjects regardless of school location. Obviously, this is a march beyond mediocrity and "one great leap for education!"

Then what does make the difference in student achievement? "Findings indicate teacher effectiveness is the main determinant of student academic progress." These findings validate Sander's system--it's not just veneer. The problem with the traditional structure of schools is that there is "almost nothing to enhance teacher growth."

Arizona is now using value-added assessment. Texas, Florida, Minnesota and Colorado have adopted elements of added value assessments and Ohio now wants to give it a try. Surprisingly, even some congressional policymakers are interested in Sanders' model accountability indicators. In fact, Congress is debating right now whether to change how states can use federal dollars. The change under consideration would allow states unprecedented flexibility in using dollars as they see fit; but in return, "states would have to demonstrate they have improved student achievement overall and narrowed the achievement gap between the highest and lowest performing students."

Wow, what a revolutionary idea—dollars for results (for 35 years Congress has doled out billions of dollars without tying dollars to improved results—school budgets are not tied to improved results either). May I ask what there is to debate?

Should teachers fear value-added indicators and measurements? Yes, because no doubt such a system would be abused and used as a weapon against them rather than as a very promising tool to help diagnose poor student performance; and, thereby, help improve instruction and learning.

Just how would this system help a teacher? There's an interesting story about a very dedicated elementary teacher who "fussed, cussed and cried when her fifth-grade math students' value-added test scores were published." With the encouragement of her principal, she worked with Dr. Sanders to find out what could be wrong.

After study and analysis, the problem was identified--her students did not stay taught—they learned and then forgot. So she developed a tracking system to re-test several weeks after a lesson had been taught. Those who had "lost it" were retrained. It worked! "Against a national average gain of 20, her 150 students progressed from 18 to 53 to 62 in successive years learning three times more than their U.S. peers." She now teaches colleagues "how-to-do-it." Nothing very complicated-- no more money, no extra staff, no smaller classes, and no excuses. As one principal said, "you can directly affect the learning of individual students… it's that simple. The hard part is getting educators and policymakers to understand that."

Should Connecticut or a local school district jump on the bandwagon or simply ignore value-added education? "Jumping" without knowledge and understanding (usually the case) leads to ultimate failure and regret. Even with good knowledge and understanding, there is usually no thorough planning for implementation and support—this is the major reason why all reform efforts have failed to achieve their intended results. But, ignoring a promising practice simply compounds complacency—the cancer in education.

Where do you think this system is criticized and resisted the most? "Schools of education have done their best to boycott the Tennessee model so most teachers and administrators have had very little training in its use." However, the threat is clear because a group of scholars plan to recommend that states "judge the quality of their teacher training graduates by tracking the value-added gains of their students during a probationary period of employment." Make schools of education accountable? My, what a radical idea!

What seems to bother some educators, among other things, is that the sophisticated statistical techniques used to provide a value-based picture of learning is so complex that the public wont be able to understand them. However, the fact is there hasn't been any reports of protest or revolt by the public or parents--at least not yet.

Is this approach the millennium miracle needed to improve school performance? No! It's simply an additional and powerful way of assessing and helping to improve school and teacher quality in order to improve student academic performance. After all, isn't this what all schools say they are striving to accomplish?

Topic

IS THE TEACHER SHORTAGE SERIOUS OR A SHAM?

In the next decade, it is estimated that 2,000,000 "new" teachers will be needed (there are currently 2.5 million employed teachers nationwide with 40,000 in Connecticut). Bonuses are now being offered to recruit teachers, Congress has passed legislation increasing funding to add more teachers, and a variety of alternative certification programs abound.

Yet, the Bureau of Labor Statistics states that "we don't see anything that would indicate there will be general teacher shortages." Not surprising since new teacher graduates number over 200,000--the number needed each year to fill anticipated vacancies. But "new" has many meanings. For example, in 1995-96, only 2.1% were really "new"--teaching for the first time. The other "new" teachers are those who return to teaching after raising a family, etc. In fact, The National Center for Education Statistics projects that the "annual growth in the number of teachers needed will decline…during the next decade." And in a survey of school districts, it found only about 20% had difficulty filling vacancies—even where there was an excess of teachers.

So, what's going on here? Why all the headlines about a teacher shortage? Is it serious or is it a sham?

According to Dr. Emily Feistritzer, Director of the National Center for Education Information, this crisis is resurrected every few years to "get more money, more programs, more publicity, more political points…this time it's President Clinton who's doing the scaremongering." She makes it sound like a sham!

Let's add two very critical facts. If there is a teacher shortage, why is it that school districts offer early retirement incentives? Why encourage and reward teachers to leave? And why are more and more states tightening certification requirements—making it more difficult to become teachers? Something doesn't make sense if, in fact, there is a teacher shortage.

Linda Darling-Hammond, Director, National Commission on Teaching & America's Future, believes that "Almost all of the shortages are self-inflicted." Why self-inflicted? About one-third of teachers leave the profession after five years; in the urban schools, it is one-half. Putting it bluntly, teacher retention is not a priority in schools (ask your school for a copy of their retention policy and program and you will get a very

surprised look). In other words, recruiting more teachers will help little if large numbers of such teachers then leave.

Why do they leave? The two most significant reasons are deplorable student behavior and pernicious parents who find fault with the teacher (school) and not the child. Other reasons include assigning teachers classes outside their field of certification (it's "not only legal, but also more covenient, less expensive, and less time consuming"); and sadistic scheduling--assigning beginning teachers the more difficult classes, and the veteran teachers the choice classes.

Therefore, producing more teacher graduates will simply add more teachers where they may not be needed (English, history and elementary teachers), and not add appreciably more to the shortage areas (math, science and special education teachers). In fact, distribution problems—getting teachers from where they are prepared to where they are needed—create most of the "spot" shortages. For example, Connecticut will be requiring 65 new math/science teachers yearly.

But this problem is compounded even more by how teachers are scheduled for classes. One of many examples is that teachers at the high school level are usually assigned four or five teaching periods, one preparation period, and one study hall. Why use certified staff to cover a study (recreation) hall? A substitute could be used to supervise the study hall at far less cost. And how are specialists utilized—special education teachers, social workers, school psychologists, and speech therapists? You can find them supervising lunch, buses, etc. Not a very good use of their time.

Another problem is the teacher certification process. In Connecticut, teacher-training institutions provide either a 5-year program or a 15-month program beyond the bachelor's degree. However, the Division of Higher Education offers an alternative 8-week summer certification program, but it only produces a handful of teachers. What is interesting is that there are plenty of qualified candidates, but spaces are limited. Then why not allow the teacher-training institutions to offer the same 8-week program? Adding to the problem is that a teaching certificate from another state is not automatically transferable to Connecticut and this keeps out many teachers.

What is so tragic is that there are many applicants for teacher preparation programs, but rigid certification requirements disqualify them even though they pass the entry-level test and have great potential.

Of course, the rigid requirements to become a teacher are to maintain "quality." In fact, Connecticut is so quality conscious that it allows convicted felons to obtain teaching certificates. Legislation has been introduced to stop this practice, but the Department of Education is opposing it. This is particularly ironic to me because, as a former Director of Teacher Interns, I had to turn down a practicing attorney who wanted to become a teacher because he did not meet the minimum grade point average (2.8) in undergraduate school which he had attended 18 years prior. His successful graduate work and years of experience could not be considered. I probably should have advised him to get a criminal record.

The fundamental issues that need to be resolved, if this problem is to be addressed vigorously and intelligently, are flexible and common-sense certification requirements, better recruiting programs, aggressive retention efforts, improved student discipline, and getting parents to be more supportive. Finally, much better use of current staff must be achieved by using technology and creative scheduling; in other words, increase productivity—a term completely foreign to Education America.

This self-inflicted problem is a glaring example of bureaucratic bungling and management mediocrity that is allowed to exist because public schools are a monopoly—there is no incentive to be more effective and efficient. This mediocrity is further compounded by the media's ignorance of what is happening inside education along with its minuscule reporting of education issues; and by legislators who offer more programs and dollars to stem the tide of mythical shortages, but offer bogus solutions.

Topic 3

SCHOOL BUDGETS

Part I—Bona Fide or Balderdash?

Nationwide, over 300 billion dollars is spent on public education (Connecticut--$5 billion). Of that amount only about 7% is from federal dollars (Connecticut--4%). About 60% covers instruction (Connecticut--64%). And the average per pupil cost is just over $6,000 (Connecticut--$8,687). The average teacher salary is $41,598 (Connecticut--$52,480).

Of interest is that nationally student enrollment grew 6% between 1977-78 and1997-98 and spending increased 23% (inflation adjusted), but in Connecticut there was a decrease of over 14% in enrollment, yet, spending still increased 24%. Apparently, when enrollment decreases, budgets still increase (this must be modern math).

So what does the public get for the dollars? Sixty-nine percent of the 8th graders still perform below the proficiency level in reading with 26% performing below the basic level, and SAT scores have increased only 1.8%--not much of a return on the investment. And where does Connecticut rank in achievement among the states? Number 11.
The 1999 edition of the Report Card on American Education (issued by the American Legislative Exchange Council) analyzed more than 200 measures of educational resources and student achievement for the past 25 years, and arrived at a startling conclusion:

"The popular assumption that correlates improved student performance alone with increasing education spending is not valid. The current path is not good enough, and that throwing more money at the problem is not the answer." This same conclusion appeared in prior Report Cards. Why no real change? No one has been "spanked" for getting a bad report card.

However, a far more dramatic conclusion was that "only higher (not lower) pupil-to-teacher ratios, fewer students per school, and a lower percentage of a state's federal dollars have a positive impact on educational achievement" (this should certainly rattle some cages).

All very interesting information to be sure, but school expenditures only become meaningful at the local level because the school budget generates the most debate, emotion, and superfluous scrutiny. How much is bona fide (trustworthy) and how much is balderdash (nonsense)? Sad to say, the public, including the reviewing boards, have a shallow approach in examining a school budget and knowing what important questions to ask.

Let's face it, in the final analysis, no matter how emotional or prolonged the budget debate, there is always an increase--the only real issue is the size of the increase. What is so mindless is that the increase has absolutely nothing to do with performance (although a winning sports team always helps). OK, let's look at some of the mindlessness involved.

How is a school budget prepared? The various line items, with few exceptions, are all increased for presumed inflation and contractual commitments. So what's wrong with that? Because it begins with a very wrong assumption that everything the school is doing in terms of programs, services, and systems must be maintained and; further, be given increases regardless of efficiency or effectiveness. In other words, "productivity" (a blasphemous word in education) is not a consideration.

One of the questions usually asked has to do with pupil-teacher ratio because the public believes it is a quality indicator of a good school system. Sorry to say, but it is the wrong question and assumption. The following relevant staffing questions are those that need to be asked, answered, reviewed, and analyzed:

1. If a ratio is to be used, the instructional staff (teachers and aides)—pupil ratio should be calculated. In Clinton, the teacher pupil ration is 13.4, but when instructional aides are included, the ratio is down to 10.5; but, again, this is really a misleading figure.

2. A much more meaningful ratio is the teacher-student load--how many students does each teacher have during the course of a day (class by class and hour by hour)? Such data is not reported. In one high school, it ranged from a total of 36 students for one teacher (7.5 students per class) to 132 students for another teacher (26.4 students per class); but the reported pupil teacher ratio was 14.7 (total district) and 20.5 (high school). Could the ratio between these two teachers have been more equitable? Yes! Did it change? No!

3. How much free time does each classroom teacher have during the course of the week? Such data is not reported. In one district, elementary teachers were free almost one-third of the day—this is not what you expect at the elementary level.

4. How is the time of non-classroom certified staff (counselors, psychologists, social workers, and speech therapists) monitored? For example, are guidance counselors required to see all their students at least twice a year at a minimum and how is this monitored to be sure it happens?

5. Are teachers utilized (scheduled and assigned) in the most efficient and cost effective manner? This data is also not reported, but let's look at a dramatic example. Three district elementary schools needed two art teachers to cover all classes required by the principals, but the principals did not want to share art teachers—each wanted their own full-time art teacher. They were asked, "what will you do with the unassigned time?" Answer: "We will find something for them to do." Such a balderdash response certainly deserved to be rewarded. Presto, three art teachers were hired. Oh well, it's only taxpayer dollars (they probably buy $695 toilet seats).

6. How does the district compare with other like districts in the utilization of staff (in a quality run school district this procedure is called "benchmarking")? A library program was being reviewed because of staffing concerns--there were two certified librarians in the high school library and not

one in the elementary schools. When comparisons were made with other districts, it was found that none had two certified librarians in the high school. An attempt to reallocate one position to the elementary schools failed. Surprised? Don't be, after all, is there a bona fide reason why the elementary schools should have a certified librarian?

So how every certified and non-certified staff member is scheduled and assigned should be available as part of the budget documents because it provides critical and meaningful information about staff utilization--the largest budget item. In other words, how a district allocates its resources really determines how much of the budget is bona-fide and how much is balderdash.

Part II—Believable or Babble?

In addition to reviewing staff utilization budget issues, school programs, services and systems need to be evaluated on a regular basis and included as part of the budget document. What are some of the questions that should be answered?

1. What is the school board policy for evaluating programs, services and systems?There should be a formal 3-5 year evaluation review cycle. If there is no policy, the budget is probably more babble than believable.

2. If there is a policy, what is the evaluation procedure? Is it a valid procedure? Using internal staff alone is not valid—the chickens cannot be guarding the hen house.

3. What are the findings from such reviews and what are the budget implications?

4. What process is in place to insure that any recommendations are implemented?

What can you expect to find in such evaluation reviews?

A speech program was being reviewed and benchmarking with other districts revealed that there were three times as many speech therapy students even though the district was the smallest. After all students were re-tested by outside evaluators, the findings were shocking. Two thirds of the students had no speech problem that could be detected even with two independent evaluators individually checking each student. Although this would appear to be a routine review process, a book could be written describing the tortuous 8-month battle.

A review of an alternative high school program (not a special education program), found that students were attending the program only two hours per day, no records were being kept of attendance, and no reliable achievement data was available. In addition, the program violated state law because it did not require a minimum 4-hour day. However, an attempt to improve the program by adding more time and establishing standards was vigorously opposed. In other words, all reviews don't necessarily result in improvements no matter what problems are found.

The high school student absence rate of 12% was being reviewed because it was more than double the national average. The figure was reported yearly, but no one had ever questioned it previously. This is why data must be analyzed and not just reported. Once it was identified as a problem, procedures were put into place that reduced the rate to 6% within one year.

In reviewing the extra-curricular programs, a red flag went up when one account was examined. What was wrong? The teacher advisor was permanently "borrowing" all of the cash funds received. Although a resignation and restitution followed, the question was raised as to why he was asked to resign (he was a popular teacher).

These "tip of the iceberg" examples explain why there must be a constant and semi-independent review process of all programs and services. The fact is, however, that uncovering such program abominations is not encouraged or welcomed (the whistle blower syndrome).

There are certainly many other issues that should be addressed in a budget document. Is there a strategic quality school improvement plan—detailed plan—for the next 5-10 years? It's a rare district that will have one; but, if there is no plan, why fund complacency?

Is there a comprehensive list of quality indicators (the various factors that help to make a quality school district) and the standards established for each indicator?

Are goods and services purchased at the lowest cost? For example, are printer cartridges purchased or ink-refill kits (about 1/5th the cost of cartridges)? Which purchased goods and services are based on bid costs? Was the bid process done locally or as part of consortium?

And there is one very important question that should always be asked at every level of the budget process: "Can the programs, services and systems be made more efficient and cost effective?" For example, can substitutes and aide positions be made more efficient and cost effective? Yes! Several universities have a teacher-intern program that provides school districts with full time teacher interns (used as substitutes and aides) for the entire school year at less than $50.00 per day and no benefits.

Does part-time staff receive the same benefits as full time staff? For example, two part-time teachers may share one full time position; but if each one receives full benefits, it becomes an unnecessary and wasteful budget expense.

These examples are not isolated, unusual or anomalies. School districts are organizations and, as such, are prone to waste, inefficiency and ineffectiveness. However, when it continues in a business, it goes bankrupt; but, when it continues in schools, the reward is a budget increase.

One final issue the budget document should address concerns technology. Technology has reshaped and redefined business in dramatic ways, but has it done the same in schools? How has technology increased productivity and school performance—has it really made a significant difference? If so, how? If not, why not? As an extreme example, a new cyber-high school (no walls and all academics will be on-line) has been started in Florida. Yet, schools are still being built the way they were 50 years ago—well not quite, they do have more wiring for computers.

What needs to be kept in mind is the conclusion of The 1999 Report Card on American Education: "America's public schools are not serving our nation (or community) as well as we should expect and our leaders must be open to new and innovative ways to improve the quality of education…it is less important to increase the investment in education than it is to make the right investments."

Therefore, the investment in education must be monitored, protected and enhanced—not squandered. Why isn't it being done more effectively? Simple! There is no reward or recognition for doing so and because the powerful "P's" prevail— petty politics, personal agendas, pleading parents, predictive pandering, perplexed perceptions, picky personalities, and proprietary power.

Is it any wonder that safeguarding the investment is difficult and tortuous? But, if public education is not made more accountable, "Public School, Inc." (free market forces based on quality, competition and client service) may replace the present monopoly of complacency.

Topic 5

EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY

Part I—Treasure or Tarradiddle?

"Our society uses the computer as its central tool for communicating and creating knowledge. Public schools do not. Most public schools misuse computers, and some cannot use them at all…For years they've used computers as a management tool, largely ignoring its remarkable capacity for creating knowledge and stimulating learning"

Technology has been promising to revolutionize education for years, but none of the promises have been kept. The promises began a century ago beginning with the film projector in 1896. It promised that "schools would be so attractive that a big army with swords and guns couldn't keep boys and girls out of it"—it didn't happen. Then came the "radio schools of the air" that promised to be as common in the classroom as the blackboard—it didn't happen. In the 1950's educational television promised to revolutionize teaching—it didn't happen. Other technologies such as language labs, teaching machines, video tapes and multi-media presentations all made similar promises to change teaching and learning—again, it did not happen. So after a century, "the potential of new tools to rescue the classrooms from the dark ages is remarkably consistent…the look and feel of schools remains fundamentally unchanged." Such a record of successful failures should have been recognized for an Oscar Century Achievement Award.

The tragedy is that the treasure of educational technology has been discovered, but only a portion of the treasure chest has been used and even that has not spent wisely or effectively. Why? Because Education America has consistently tried to fit technology into an obsolete, monopolistic, bureaucratic and politicized empire whose immune system is resistant to every reform.

In other words, the impact educational technology has had in improving teaching and learning is a tarraraddidle (a myth). "Schools, despite their acquisition of millions of computers (estimated at 4-5 million)

waddle along as they have for eons…with the chalk in one hand and their backs to the slate board, American teachers' main technology can be said to be Neolithic--they write upon one rock with another."

What does the research indicate about the effectiveness of computers in the classroom? A study by Education Testing Service found that "the longer students spend in front of the keyboard, the lower their math scores fall (seat time does not equate to learning time)…and that black children are now spending more time at computers than other students, but that this increased computer usage has been associated with an even wider gap in their achievement."

In 1998, EDUCATION WEEK tried to measure the value of computers and found that "well-trained teachers could boost student scores with certain uses of computers in the classroom." They also found something else. "Students who spent more time on computers in school didn't score any higher than their peers." Most interesting of all was that two-thirds of the teachers rely on educational technology to a "minimal extent or not at all."

Andrew Coulson, an educational software engineer, believes that: "Our current technological jihad is going on not because there is reliable widespread evidence of its effectiveness, but because it seems like a good idea to certain influential political and business leaders." And. Diane Reed of the U.S. Office of Education said: "Deep inside our guts we know it's working, but proving it is another story."

However, if the technology is not implemented properly, and it has not been, there should be no surprise that the rabid research seems inconclusive or negative.

Yet, in a Report to the President, prepared by a distinguished panel of experts, its review of the research arrived at an opposite conclusion: "…dozens of independent studies have found the students using such technology significantly outperform those taught without the use of such systems with the largest differences recorded for students of lower socio-economic status, low achievers, and those with certain special learning problems."

Clearly, there is research that contradicts other research and obviously researchers don't read all of the available research. There is another important fact to keep in mind. Only 0.1 percent of the public school expenditures are invested to determine what educational techniques actually work and to find ways to improve them. If the corporate world were as stingy with its dollars for research and development, we would still be in the stone age.

The reality is that technology hasn't really changed anything in education. The test is simple. Shut down all the computers in every school and what would happen? Nothing! Shut down every computer in the world outside of education and everything would come to a screeching halt.

Where does Dandy Daddy (federal government) stand on this issue? The 1995 plan that was based on making computers available in all classrooms with Internet access, having all teachers trained, and having effective software available is being revised. What does Dandy Daddy plan to do now? Look at the experiences teachers and students are having—what a dandy idea.

What does the Connecticut State Board of Education believe about technology? Its position paper states: "The effective use and integration of educational technology is a key factor in improving educational achievement and equity and producing a competent and technologically literate work force to promote

economic growth…Technology alone will not transform schools. Rather, schools must be transformed comprehensively and systematically in order to make effective use of technology."

Wow, what eloquent and challenging words for school districts. There is even a Statewide Educational Technology Plan (163 pages) that has been provided to all schools so that they can go about the business of transforming themselves. What more can school districts want? Isn't it so exciting to see so many schools transformed or being transformed? Where are they? Now that is a very interesting question, but don't expect an answer. No such school exists in Connecticut. What's the problem? Either the plan is no real treasure for districts, or local districts are really perplexed as to what to do. There is also the fear that the changes required to really transform a school for technology would cause too much turmoil.

Does any such school exist? Yes! Daniel Jenkins Academy, a public school in Polk County, Florida, is designed around technology and all academic classes are on-line. The students who lined up in overwhelming numbers to register did not share the lackluster faith of the district school administrators in this futuristic cyber high school. What is really innovative is that the school has built in opportunities for socialization. The students will come together daily for lunch, and they will be able to participate in extra-curricular activities and sports in a nearby high school.

What was the impetus for this transformation? Surprisingly, it wasn't technology, but rather a lack of space for the burgeoning student population. Nevertheless, technology was used as the solution to solve a very real and common problem. This cyber high school will be monitored by USA TODAY in a series of articles to track its triumphs and missteps.

A special report by THE WALL STREET JOURNAL on educational technology stated: "Almost everybody agrees that technology can revolutionize education. But after spending millions of dollars to bring computing to the classroom, most schools deserve, at best, a grade of incomplete." That is really where educational technology is at—incomplete. It is not a failure, yet!

Part II--Is CT Ed Tech Plan a Tabernacle or Twaddle?

Can you imagine a "virtual" teacher being beamed into a classroom that would be interactive--hold conversations and make eye contact with students? No, this is not a sequel from Star Trek. The technology to teleport holographs of teachers was demonstrated in England a few months ago and the implications are mindboggling. For example, envision making the "best teachers" available in every classroom at a fraction of the cost of "real" teachers.

So educational technology is not just about computers (hardware) and the Internet (connectivity); but, sadly, that's where the current thinking is of Education America. How is Connecticut doing with educational technology? In 1995, a Statewide Educational Technology Plan (SETP) was completed for the State Board of Education by the Center for Educational Leadership and Technology. SETP first analyzed the educational technology effort in the state and then made many recommendations.

Interestingly, Connecticut was not found to be a leader among the states in terms of implementing educational technology (Florida, Kentucky, Maine, North Carolina, Vermont and even Rhode Island are among the leaders). The Plan clearly states that, "Connecticut lacks the technology resources necessary to ensure equitable educational opportunities to its citizens and to prepare students for the 21st century. Furthermore, a lack of consistent statewide leadership and standards regarding technology have left the

majority of Connecticut school districts relatively untouched by the kinds of curriculum reform and transformation desired."

Other key findings included: (1) Systematic integration of technology tools in the teaching and learning processes is minimal (2) Schools lack a statewide education network (3) Local leaders do not have compatible software (4) Schools are insufficiently funded and (5) Local districts lack comprehensive plans.

Translating the educational gobbledygook, the technology effort was given an "F." Shame! Shame! Shame! Connecticut with the highest per capita income, highest teacher salaries, a flourishing high tech environment, and a sinful budget surplus find the state and schools floundering in the black hole of technology cyberspace.

The issue for school districts is whether the SETP is a technology tabernacle in which to worship for divine guidance or is it twaddle (nonsense)? The Plan's real purpose is to help the state get its tech act in order, and help school districts prepare their own technology plan. Here we go again, each district must reinvent the wheel of technology; after all, local control must be maintained. This is twaddle—a brainless Pontius Pilot approach that is wasteful in time, effort and dollars. The fact that the timetable required implementation of the recommendations by 2000 is also twaddle. Why?

There are two reasons. First, since SETP was published in December 1995, school districts were already into the budget process for the 1996-97 school year—there simply was insufficient time to plan and prepare for the next school year. The earliest any district could start planning and preparing was the 1997-98 school year; and it is doubtful that most districts moved quickly to implement any recommendations.

The second reason is far more serious. Schools are not committed to being transformed and reformed by technology. SETP gave the local districts a pretty good thrashing for their lack of progress and commitment; but there is another indicator as well. The Institute for the Transfer of Technology in Education specializes in providing information and guidance to schools, but only a half-dozen Connecticut schools are members with just two shoreline communities listed--Milford and Groton.

However, schools are not entirely to blame. Clearly, the State Department of Education has not provided effective, timely or aggressive leadership. In addition, most districts are too busy preparing for the next budget battle, handling building programs, dealing with burgeoning costs of special education, and wrestling with testing and standards to mention a few practical issues. The "virtual" teacher is certainly not on any school board agenda.

What the state needs to do is appoint a Technology Czar independent of the Department of Education; but, of course, this will not happen—it would be too sensible and effective.

So what should school districts do? Wait for the state to provide real leadership (hell may freeze over before that happens) or go it alone? Unfortunately, reality requires that districts—at least those really desiring to fully utilize the potential of technology—must do it on their own (but not necessarily alone since partnerships can be developed with other school districts). What can a school district do to get started? An organized system and structure is required to make things happen.

It must start with the school board adopting a very clear and dynamic policy that it is committed to technology for reforming and transforming the schools (the discussion of such a policy would certainly be

very lengthy and lively)—all technology reports, studies and recommendations indicate that this is the required goal.

The technology effort must then be made the responsibility of a full-time (part-time wont do it) central office administrator with an appropriate technology background.
A permanent school-community technology core committee must support this administrator. Its membership should consist of about nine members who have technological skills and interest. In every community there are those working and retired who would be glad to serve, and the corporate world would be enthusiastic in assigning resources—human and material--to such an effort.

Each core member would head up a special subcommittee such as hardware, connectivity, curriculum, legal, evaluation, monitoring, training and education, research and public relations with about 5-10 members on each subcommittee. School personnel should be represented only as ad-hoc members to provide information and expertise. And it would be absolutely essential to educate and train committee members as to their roles, responsibilities and authority. The primary function of the committee would be to make recommendations, not decisions.

If there is a technology plan, the committee should review and revise it; if there is no plan, its first task would be to develop one.

Let's look at just one very critical issue for the core committee to resolve—how should computers be deployed in the schools? Should there be some in each classroom, if so, how many; or is it more effective to concentrate computers in a variety of learning labs—reading and language arts lab, science lab, math lab, etc. Each subcommittee would have a role in helping to resolve the issue. Does SETP address this issue? Yes, "complete classrooms of computer systems are best suited to achieving technology initiatives." It also provides help in dealing with other tech topics, but using it alone will not provide the "divine" tech guidance needed. There are many other useful and excellent resources that should be used.

There is more twaddle in SETP because it states that: "With the advent of educational technology, the entire concept of teaching and learning is being reexamined and redefined." Well, it just isn't happening! But there is something to worship in the technology tabernacle: "…the effective use and integration of technology is the key factor in improving education." Unfortunately, the tabernacle is rather empty. There is no Pied Piper to bring in the tech parishioners, and there is no tech czar in the pulpit.

Topic 6

ARE EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS SALVATION OR SEDUCTION?

It is hard to believe that in 1996, in the midst of the technological revolution and global competition, only 14 states had adopted standards in the core academic subjects (English, math, science and history). It is still harder to understand why it has taken more than a century to start establishing clear and rigorous standards for what every child should know and be able to do.

Establishing standards is another reform effort to make students and schools more accountable. What started the movement to raise standards?

It began with the release of the 1983 report, A Nation At Risk, which concluded that, "a rising tide of educational mediocrity threatens our very future as a Nation and people." Yet, fifteen years later, mediocrity continues to flourish. Since 1983, 10 million students reached the 12th grade not even having learned to read at the basic level. Over 20 million have reached their senior year unable to do basic math. Almost 25 million have reached 12th grade not knowing the essentials of U.S. history. And over 6 million students dropped out of high school altogether.

In recent international testing, U.S. students placed 19th out of 21 nations in math and 16th out of 21 in science. And advanced students did even worse, scoring dead least in physics.

So it should come as no surprise that polling data by Public Agenda show that overwhelming majorities of Americans support raising standards—at least on an abstract level. And a Peter Hart survey in 1998 found that nine in ten Americans still believe "low academic standards is a serious concern in the nation’s schools."

This certainly seems like salvation for the schools-- a way to redemption for past poor performance sins. And with such strong public support--for the concept, not the reality--the standards movement should certainly be a catalyst for meaningful school reform (as long as it doesn't hurt too much).

Now for a reality check. Are standards really seduction (a trap) in disguise to give the appearance that higher expectations are genuine?

About 45 states have now adopted standards of sorts, but according to the Center for Educational Reform, "only a handful actually require schools and students to meet them." And surveys by Public Agenda found that "half of teachers say that hasn't changed what they expect from students." In other words, set standards, but don't require any changes in expectations.

The State of the State Standards 2000 published by the Thomas Fordham Foundation points to a sorry state of standards. It ranks the states under different categories with only five states listed with solid standards (Alabama, California, North Carolina, South Carolina and Texas) and 21 listed as Irresponsible States--Connecticut has the distinction of being included within this group. In fact, Connecticut's progress in setting standards received a C minus in 1998 but it did progress in 2000--downward to a D plus. What was the Department of Education's response to this report? "We in Connecticut do things a little differently; (we're) less prescriptive, more advisory." It's also interesting to note that Connecticut's Educational Goal for 2000-2010: Closing the Achievement Gap does not even mention standards in listing what needs to be done over the next decade to close the achievement gap.

So what's going on with the standards movement? Putting it in simple terms, the actual implementation of rigorous standards is a much more difficult pill for communities to swallow.

Why? Because when students score poorly on standards-based testing, it is easier to blame lower student scores on the tests than to acknowledge that, until now, schools have not been pushing children to achieve at world-class levels.

One of the problems is that there is little patience for the long-term changes that schools need to make to produce consistently higher levels of student achievement. If standards are to survive short-term backlash and truly benefit students over the long haul, policymakers and decisionmakers must take the lead in driving home their messages to parents that higher expectations for students now will lead to greater success later on in life. Unfortunately, too many of them are now part of the anti-standards movement.

It should be understood that setting standards is not an easy task. According to a study by the Mid-continent Regional Educational Laboratory, Inc., "far too many standards have been identified. As an example, there are three different sets of science standards. In fact, if American educators were to adequately cover all of the knowledge identified in the current set of standards for the core subject areas, it might take as much as 22 years of schooling (literally!)."

But there is an even more sinister issue at work. When many students cannot meet standards, the answer is really very simple. Instead of finding out what is wrong with the system and making meaningful improvements, it is easier to change or lower the standards even if it involves cheating by educators. In fact, there has been such a backlash to high-standards testing programs that many states have had to weaken, delay or eliminate tough testing standards. "Across the nation, parents, civil rights activists, educators and

students are organizing rallies, buttonholing officials and flooding newspapers with letters to the editor in a brewing backlash against state-mandated academic standards."

In Los Angeles, the superintendent was fired because of his aggressive stand on implementing standards. Who has replaced him? Former Colorado Governor John Romer whose job will apparently be to lower standards.

But Dandy Daddy (U.S. Office of Education) has an even better solution—declare the tests invalid because "the use of any educational test which has a significant disparate impact on members of any particular race, national origin, or sex is discriminatory unless the school using the test can prove otherwise." Lawyers and civil rights activists will have a field day with this one.

And when all else fails, declare success anyway. That's what the National Goals Panel did when the eight goals it set 10 years prior to be met in 2000 were not reached. That's probably because no state did worse in student achievement than in 1989. After all, that's considered progress in education.

Can the standards movement be salvaged? A National Education Summit (the third in the past dozen years) was held last year with governors, business leaders and educators. Its purpose was to develop yet another plan to "reignite the standards-based reform movement across the country." It ended with the hope that the "newly crafted plan would become more than high-powered lip service that failed to achieve real improvements." Apparently, it must have assumed that the previous standards movement seduced the public. What's new? More rigorous curriculums (standards) must be developed. Clearly, "rigor" caused the standards movement to flounder, so the answer is to have more rigor. The rising level of stupidity never seems to end. What is significant, however, is that "if such intervention fails, we will be prepared to restructure or reconstitute schools or provide parents and students other options."

A powerful statement to be sure, but is it simply more seduction? To date, every reform effort has failed so it is hard to believe that another educational summit will make any difference. The reality is that "threats" have no impact. Schools are tied to an ox and plod along unaffected by every effort to be held accountable because there are no real consequences for continued failure and mediocrity. The standards movement, under attack and floundering badly, will in all likelihood be added to the garbage heap of failed reforms.

Topic 7

SCHOOL SAFETY

Part I--Secure or Scary?

A Hartford Courant editorial (July 10, 2000) stated that "…school violence, despite such highly visible cases as the Columbine High shootings, has not increased in the past 25 years." Should this be reassuring to parents whose greatest concern is school safety?

The source for this statement came from "The Condition of Education 2000" report published by the National Center for Educational Statistics. The problem is that it refers to violence in grade 12 only—not

grades K-11. Furthermore, there is no data supporting this statement in the report itself. The statistical data comes from Condition of Education 1999 that had a section on School Victimization; interestingly, there was not such section in the 2000 report. It should also be noted that schools provided the information in a survey that covered only one week of the school year. In addition, the schools were asked to report only those acts of violence that were reported to police (just under 500,000). For example, school fights are not normally reported to police. So how believable is the data suggesting that school violence has not changed in 25 years?

On the contrary, a variety of data suggest that school violence has declined particularly in the past few years.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that between 1993 and 1997, reports of physical fights by students declined 14%, fights that caused injuries declined 20%, and the number of students who self-reported carrying a weapon declined 30%.

A joint study by the Bureau of Justice Statistics and the National Center for Education Statistics found that between 1993 and 1997, school crimes declined 29%, serious violent crimes declined 34%, violent crimes (including fighting) declined 27%, and thefts declined 29%.

A survey by Metropolitan Life in 1998 found that twice as many teachers, twice as many students, and three times as many law enforcement officials reported that the level of violence in their schools had declined from the previous year. Eighty-six percent of teachers, and 89% of students and law enforcement surveyed said that they thought their local schools were safe.

This data would seem to indicate that school safety is rather secure. Yet, if these statistics are to be believed, why is it that school suspensions and expulsions have increased? According to the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights "suspensions have increased steadily for all students, rising from 1.7 million to 3.1 million by 1997? One of the issues in school expulsions is that a disproportionate number involve African-American and special education students. Suspensions (less serious acts) and expulsions (very serious acts) are the result of violating school rules. Therefore, if there is reportedly less violence, why have expulsion and suspensions almost doubled?

One reason is that school officials feel they will be held liable if they do not take drastic action to guard against potential school violence and crime. Another reason is that perhaps all the incidents of violence and crime in school are not being reported (school officials do not want to report anything that may cast a negative shadow on the schools).

A book in progress "Crisis of Violence & Hatred in Today's Schools" by Tina O'Rourke, a former teacher, provides an interesting insight into what is really happening. "I have been rebuked for writing referrals for 'idle threats,' and have been reprimanded for writing up too many kids even though every one was for a valid reason. Numerous teachers are placed in situations that society knows nothing about and many people would be outraged if they found out"

She supports her beliefs by citing the experience of other teachers: "I know the emphasis placed on headcounts and the politics that keeps misbehaving kids in the classroom to harass and threaten teachers and students. I have witnessed the great difficulty in protecting victim students where teachers and administrators do more to protect the misbehaving student go so far as to blame the victim just to keep from dealing with groups of students." In other words, "political correctness" seems to take precedence over truthfulness.

What is also interesting to note in all of the statistics is that the presence of street gangs in schools increased from 15% to 28% between 1989 and 1995. Incidentally, the increases occurred in urban, suburban and rural schools. Gangs promote school violence, and according to the Justice Department, "gang members fought once or twice a week or even every day and that 78% of students from schools with gangs report getting drugs more easily." The 1998 White House Conference on School Safety reported that "violence and drugs are linked." This conference also reported that "students who felt unsafe at or on their way to school had increased." So how is it possible that violence is on the decrease with escalating suspensions and expulsions, gang presence on a sharp increase, and more students feeling unsafe?

The Family Research Council published a report, "Violence in the Schoolhouse: A Ten-Year Update," and concluded, "violence at school is worse today than it was ten years ago (1984-1994)."

A National School Boards Association survey indicated that "violence has increased every year over the last five years in 82 percent of the nation's school systems (1989-1994)."

The Institute for Social Research reported that in 1992, 91.6 percent of high school seniors worried about crime and violence, and their greatest concern was drug abuse.

The National Teachers' Association reported that "900 teachers are threatened, and over 2,000 students and nearly 40 teachers are physically attacked on school grounds every hour of each school day each year."

There is another issue to consider in examining the statistical data and that has to do with student enrollments. From 1982 to the early 90's, there was in decrease in high school enrollments which are projected to increase steadily to 2007 (15 to 17 million). Increased enrollments can be expected to increase actual violence, but not necessarily "reported" violence.

What is obvious from all of the data is that how it is reported, how the information is captured, and how "violence" is defined has a great deal to do with whether school safety can be viewed as secure or scary.

Part II—What Are The Causes of School Violence?

Gangs, drugs, alcohol, and lack of discipline are threats to school safety and inevitably lead to school violence—verbal abuse, fighting, theft, sexual assaults, vandalism, physical assaults, shootings and killings. But what causes students to join gangs, consume drugs and alcohol, and have contempt and disregard for school and societal standards of behavior?

There are many reasons, but in simple terms, children of violence are growing up without being raised. In a report by the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, "the disintegration of the family is a major root of the crisis of violence…troubled parents fail to give their children the nurture, guidance and control they need to help them develop compassion, establish attachments and learn boundaries."

Dorothy Lewis of New York University makes the same point. "Kids are being raised by more and more disturbed parents…and what this lack of parenting breeds is misshapen personalities. The consequence is that children are left emotionally devastated, self-centered, angry, and alienated."

A Ball State University study found that 43 percent of 12-18 year olds say it's okay for siblings of either sex to hit each other as a way of dealing with conflict. "There is no strong taboo against violence and it can easily become a mark of honor in some youth subcultures." By the time American kids are 18 years old they have watched 26,000 murders on television alone. "It is contrary to common sense and research to think you can create such a culture and not have any effects." Even more alarming, according to Leonard Eron, chair of the American Psychological Association on Violence and Youth, is that "parents who grew up watching violent television are more likely to use violence in their own parenting."

Another contributing factor is that the music of mayhem--the rock music typically full of vile lyrics and the sordid behavior of so many of the rock stars--feed the frenzy of excitement that so many of our youth seem to crave and tend to imitate.

Children growing up in such environments lose "connectedness" and feel isolated. Arnold Goldstein, of the Center for Research on Aggression, notes that "our culture sets a tone that encourages self-centeredness and, in turn, violence. We are a nation whose role models, presidents, and leaders on Wall Street have set the tone for the country—I'm going to get mine."

So children enter the school and classroom doors with weighty cultural, emotional, and psychological baggage strapped to their hearts and minds. Teachers and administrators must then deal with the baggage children bring while trying to teach; it is no easy task. For example, children who are already scared from dysfunctional families and a valueless society do not develop acceptable social skills; and, as a result are rejected by their peers and even teachers. Such students then experience school failure and connect with other deviant peers to support their antisocial behaviors. The results are predictable--they become angrier, more hostile, and more violent.

Added to the problem of school violence is that federal, state and local policymakers pass mindless legislation, adopt policies, and develop perceptions and practices that exacerbate the problem even more. For example, two thirds of state legislatures have enacted some form of legislation to erode confidentiality provisions concerning children who commit offenses, a protection which is a major tenet of the juvenile justice system's focus on rehabilitation. And the National Office for Civil Rights reports that "suspension and expulsion policies have a much greater impact on minority students and special education students."

One way schools have tried to stem the tide of escalating violence is adopting zero tolerance policies that mandate pre-determined consequences or punishment for specific offenses. But does it make sense for a kindergarten child to be expelled for bringing a water pistol to class?

Schools certainly do attempt to teach values and discipline. However, schools are no longer considered to be in "loco-parentis" (in place of parents) status. The courts have effectively removed the schools from such a role and have endowed students with the rights of adults but without the corresponding responsibilities. In addition, they have forged a highway of litigation to prevail over any action the schools may use to enforce discipline and even a value-centered environment. Worse yet, the courts then allow schools to be sued for not taking every action possible to prevent school violence. It's an absolutely no win situation for schools. Yet, not a single report, study or survey mentions that this judicial jaundice is one of the root causes of the escalation of school violence and makes prevention strategies all the more difficult.

Another cause is that there has been erosion of values, which are part of a formal culture consisting of traditions and mores. The Hamilton Fish National Institute on School and Community Violence reports that

"traditional values which inhibit antisocial behavior are no longer reinforced the way they were just a few decades ago." Formal culture acts as a filter to help youth sift through the larger world, but popular or youth culture is so pervasive that formal culture is not learned or simply ignored.

So what are schools to do? The U.S. Department of Justice just released a 63-page conference document, Preventing School Violence—it's academia at its worst. This is only one of many reports dealing with violence prevention, but few provide realistic and effective solutions. For example, School Crime: A National CrimeVictimization Survey Report found that "although there would seem to be clear differences in the potential effectiveness of a range of commonly used school safety measures, studies have found no significant relationship between these measures and students' chances of violent victimization."

Schools often add to the problem when students are allowed to wander the halls during classes, when graffiti and trash is not quickly removed, and when there is a fear to discipline. Such an environment invites students to further test what behaviors they can get away with.

Does this mean the problem is hopeless? No, but communities must realize that the schools cannot do the job alone. The schools simply mirror the culture; until the societal and family cultures change, violence will remain a cancerous plague.

However, there is one rather effective and simple thing schools can do. What the research indicates clearly is that "failure to master reading predicted later depression, and early aggressive-disruptive behavior predicted later conduct and drug abuse disorders." Therefore, ensuring early reading success and providing early intervention help for aggressive behavior may do more to reduce school violence than all the security efforts combined.

Topic 8

ARE SCHOOL VOUCHERS "SNAKE OIL" IN DISGUISE?

In 1990, Milwaukee implemented the nation's first choice plan that provides a voucher to a limited number of students from low-income families to be used to pay tuition at a secular or religious school of their choice. Although challenged in the courts on the grounds that it conflicted with the separation of church and state, the Wisconsin Supreme Court in 1997 upheld the program, and in 1998 the U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear an appeal.

The use of vouchers may seem like a new idea, but the concept goes back to revolutionary times. Thomas Paine believed that "...education, to be useful to the poor, should be on the spot; and the best method to accomplish this, is to enable the parents to pay the expenses themselves through a tuition scholarship plan."

It took over 200 years for voucher programs to finally become a reality. Voucher programs, of one kind or another, are now in Arizona, Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Ohio, and Vermont and it is a ballot initiative in California and Michigan. A state judge has ruled that the Florida voucher program violates a portion of

state's constitution, but it is being appealed. Unsuccessful attempts were made to pass voucher programs in New Mexico, Texas, and Pennsylvania.

Does Connecticut have a voucher program? No! However, during the past budget session, Governor Rowland did propose a $500 tax credit program for parents whose children attended private school-- the proposal never got to a vote.

In addition to taxpayer supported voucher programs, there are about two dozen privately financed and operated programs. One of the most interesting is the Children's Scholarship Fund. It offered vouchers to all low-income students entering kindergarten through 8th grade. By the application deadline (March 1999), 1,250,000 applications were received (30 times the number of scholarships available) from all 50 states, representing 22,000 communities and 90% of all counties. With the limited money available, only 40,000 scholarships were awarded by lottery. This overwhelming response certainly indicates strong parent support for voucher programs, as well as, a 1999 Gallup Poll, in which 59% of public school parents (68% of nonwhite parents) favored voucher programs.

There is, at yet, no federally sponsored voucher program. Congress did pass a small voucher plan (involving 2,000 students) for the District of Columbia—Student Opportunity Scholarship Act of 1998, but it was vetoed by President Clinton. The Act did have strong opposition in the Senate where it was described as being "snake oil," and that D.C. parents, ministers and local leaders did not want a voucher program. Yet, a Washington Post poll showed that 65% of African-Americans in D.C. with incomes under $50,000 favored vouchers.

The school voucher issue is part of the presidential campaign so its future outcome at the federal level is uncertain. But it is interesting to note that many members of Congress believe in school choice for their children. A Heritage Foundation survey found that 35% of the Representatives and 50% of the Senators with children of school age send their children to private schools—"especially in the nation's capital."

The basic issue is whether voucher programs are a viable means to reform public schools, as well as, provide better education; or, is it just another reform effort that, like all others, will prove valueless? This question has generated fiery debate among parents, policymakers, and educators. An editorial in *Rethinking Schools* stated that: "It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of the debate over vouchers."

Among the arguments of those who oppose voucher programs--including the American Civil Liberties Union and the teacher unions--is that public support will erode, financial support will decline, the best students will be lost, the separation of church and state will be violated, and American democracy and values will be undermined. This last issue seems rather hollow because isn't one of the fundamental principles of a democracy to have "choice" rather than a forced "monopoly?"

And even though the teacher unions oppose choice programs of any kind, many of their members exercise choice for themselves. A 1990 survey by the Center for Education Reform found that "the percentage of public school teachers in America's cities who enroll their children in private schools is staggering: Boston, 44%, Cleveland, 39%, San Francisco 36%, Chicago 36%, Philadelphia 36% and Pittsburgh 36%." If so many urban teachers reject the schools they teach in, shouldn't parents be given the same option?

Among the arguments by supporters is that increased competition will force under-performing public schools to improve, allow parents more influence and choice over their children's education, provide better educational options for poor and minority students, improve academic achievement, and liberate education from bureaucrats and politicians.

The most important question concerning voucher programs is whether they make a difference. A study by the Institute for Justice found that where there are choice programs, "a sense of urgency and zeal for reform has been instilled not seen in the past when a school's failure was rewarded only with more money that reinforced failure."
Another study by the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research found that: "Among the researchers who have collected and analyzed the data on the effects of school choice there is largely agreement that these programs are generally positive in their effects and ought to be continued if not expanded."

Andrew Coulson, author of *Market Education: The Unknown History* compared school systems from all over the world, from ancient times to the present. He concluded that "Competitive educational markets have consistently done a better job of serving the public than state-run educational systems…which are a fossilized legacy of central planning and good intentions gone awry."

What does the future hold for voucher programs? The debate will certainly intensify, the U.S. Supreme Court, sooner or later, will have to decide on its constitutionality, and programs will expand; however, they will not cause an exodus from the public schools. Why? Because Gallup Polls have consistently shown that parents rate their own schools high while rating "the other schools" low. But there are practical issues that will also prevent any exodus. For example, consider what would happen if every school age child received a voucher, where would they go? There are simply not enough vacancies in "other" schools nor could such schools expand fast enough to accommodate even a small percentage of additional students. Another limiting factor is transportation because parents want their children to attend schools closest to home.

In the final analysis, the real problem with vouchers, and other school choice options, is that it threatens powerful entrenched interests. The challenge is to do what is best for those children who are failing, and who are destined to fail, within the current rigid and monopolistic educational empire in which only those with the means have a choice.

Topic 9

ARE CHARTER SCHOOLS THE BIGGEST BOONDOGGLE SINCE NEW COKE?

Minnesota started the first charter schools in 1993, and now 33 states have 2,000 charter schools operating with a total enrollment of 500,000. What are charter schools? They are independent public schools designed and operated by virtually anyone or any group, under the sponsorship of local or state educational organizations who monitor their quality and integrity. Charters are different because they operate free from traditional bureaucratic systems, regulatory red tape, and micromanagement.

It's interesting to note that in the latest Phi Delta Gallup Poll, 50% of the respondents never heard of charter schools; but when given information about them, 47% opposed the idea, while 42 percent said they approved--down from 54% in 1994.
The purpose of charter schools is to encourage innovative teaching practices and provide a choice for parents. Typically, charters have small classes (average school enrollment is about 250), a focused curricular emphasis, academic rigor, and very active parent involvement.

But there is another mission for charter schools which is to bring about "better" public schools. According to the Center for Educational Reform, "Wherever a large number of charters are clustered, traditional schools begin to behave differently in order to keep up." Sorry, but that's a little hard to swallow; there simply is no evidence that the existence of charters have changed public schools for the better. One large school district changed its purchasing procedure because the local charter purchased computers in six days at lower cost whereas it took them one year. Yes, it behaved differently; but is this what charters are supposed to do? Let's face it, the primary reason charters push district schools to compete is because state subsidies (charters are funded by tax dollars) follow the students; in other words, the regular public school loses the per-pupil funding for every student who leaves. However, funding formulas for charters differ among the states, from about 75% of actual public school per pupil expenditures to a full 100%.

Connecticut passed charter school legislation in 1996 and there are now 17 charter schools enrolling around 2,000 students (24 charters are authorized). "Any person, group, local or regional school board, or regional education service center" is eligible to apply. Interestingly, Connecticut's law is ranked with a low "C" because "the degree of autonomy and funding is heavily dependent upon state and local mandates." In contrast to Connecticut, Arizona has 400 charter schools with a total student enrollment of 95,000.
Charter schools do have strong and vocal critics that include school administrators, school board members, teacher unions, and others who feel threatened by various implications of the charter concept. Teacher unions fear that charters are just another covert attempt by enemies of public education to break up the system and "bust teacher unions". And, according to the Minnesota Education Association, charter schools are "the biggest boondoggle since New Coke."

In addition to the critics there are obstacles and hurdles placed in the path of charter schools. For example, a Little Hoover Commission study in California found that "both the State Department of Education and sponsoring school districts have taken actions that constrain the ability of charter schools to operate freely."

The critics also claim that charters lack rigor and integrity and further that they will "skim off the cream of the crop" of students, drain resources from the public schools, attract the most active and involved school parents, and compromise ethnic or racial diversity. However, the available data refutes such claims. A study by the Goldwater Institute found that students attending Arizona's charter schools entered with 5%-12% lower average scores on standardized test scores and that half of the students had not previously been in school. In fact, one of the interesting outcomes of the charter school movement is that about 10% of children previously enrolled in private or home school environments are enrolled in charters.

A study by the Pioneer Institute found that 48% of Massachusetts's charter school students are minorities (more than double the state average of 21%) and that 18% speak a language other than English. The Hudson Institute found that charter schools across the country average 63% minority and that 19% of the students had disabilities that affect their education.

It's true that parents are more involved with charters, not necessarily because they started out that way, but because they are encouraged to participate and they feel more welcomed and empowered (public schools should take note of this).

So in the face of such overwhelming data rebutting the claims, some critics are now claiming that charters will instead become a "dumping ground" for the academically underprivileged—you just can't win an argument with the critics.

The important issue concerning charters is whether they are successful. According to a report, *Charter Schools: Changing the Face of American Education*, "more than 50 reports on the progress, success rates and achievement of charters have been completed…80 percent show that charter schools are achieving their goals."

What charters are demonstrating is that "anyone or any group" can run a school (private and parochial schools proved this long ago), and that the mountains of regulations and certification requirements may not add much, if anything, to a "successful" school. After all, charters (along with vouchers, home schooling, and privatization) would not be in existence if the public were satisfied with the existing public schools.

Does the growth and success of charters suggest that public school bureaucracies can be eliminated along with tons of regulations? No wonder there are critics among school administrators, local boards and teacher unions—charters and the other alternatives threaten their existence. But think what would happen if all 80,000 public schools became charter schools? It would be a nightmare! Each school would be doing its own thing, its own way, and all going in different directions rather than fulfilling the original mission of the public school system which was to provide a common educational and socializing experience "for the masses"—a requirement for a sane and harmonious society.

Yet, in all of this rhetoric, there still remains an extremely important and unanswered question: do charter schools serve the needs of children and society or the wants of parents and politicians (they are not the same)?

Chapter 10

WILL PRIVATIZATION OF SCHOOLS FIZZLE OR FLOURISH?

Wall Street is salivating at the profit opportunities they see in privatization--the private management of education. Why this interest? According to the National Center for Policy Analysis: "Education's traditional custodians by and large have fallen down on the job and business people, adept at problem solving, think they can far outperform unionized teachers, bureaucratic school boards and uninspired politicians."

What the privateers are targeting is a 350 billion-dollar public school industry that is consumed with cost inflation, waste, inefficiencies, public dissatisfaction, and inequities. For example, they see potential waste where only half of all school employees are teachers, and noninstructional and support activities total 42 percent of public education spending (1990 data).

The for-profit education industry started at the beginning of this decade, but its roots really go back to the l960-70 era when "contracting out" goods and services (transportation, food services, and facilities management.) accelerated. The difference now is that the privateers are forming EMO's—educational management organizations (like HMO's) with curriculum and instruction being managed as well.

Just over three billion dollars of private venture capital has been poured into the education industry, but only 250 schools enrolling some 100,000 students are being managed by private companies. Chris Whittle, founder of the fast-growing Edison Schools, projects that in 20 years, 20-30 percent of public schools will be run by for-profit companies. Edison is the largest for-profit manager of 80 schools; and, so far, it has raised 350 million dollars. It's key features are a much longer school day, longer school year, 90 minutes a day devoted to reading instruction, and providing each child with a home computer.

How are privately managed schools doing academically? Edison claims that its "students have gained more than 5 points per year on nationally normed achievement tests." In New York City, Dayton, Ohio, and Washington, DC, the testing performance of African-Americans who switched from public to privatized schools showed an average increase of 6.3 points in their percentile rankings on standardized math and reading tests after two years.

However, according to the American Federation of Teachers student achievement has generally declined under privatized schools. In Baltimore, two years of test results showed a widening gap between students in elementary schools managed by Education Alternatives, Inc. (EAI) and other city schools. Furthermore, EAI boasted that it would reduce overhead costs by 25%, return 20% back to the classroom, retain 5% for profit and that it would do so with regular union teachers. The reality was that it ended up costing $20,000,000 more.

Hartford experimented with having its schools managed by Education Alternatives, Inc. The sales pitch was dazzling and the promises irresistible. School buildings would be renovated, class size reduced, fancy computer labs installed, and test scores would go up. Well, it didn't take long for the promises to perish, the accusations to accumulate, and the experiment to end.

Privatization also faces other obstacles. A Pennsylvania State judge ruled that Beacon Education Management could not manage the Wilkinsburg school district because the state charter does not allow schools to be managed by private, for profit companies.

Hard Lessons—Public Schools and Privatization (Twentieth Century Fund publication) concludes that "the promise of saving money and improving educational quality through privatization is being oversold…and the magic wand of privatization must be abandoned."

What the privateers are learning the hard way is that they underestimated the political, social, and management complexities of public schools and probably overestimated the waste involved. However, the privateers' ability to learn and refocus should not be underestimated. They know that the status quo--union contracts in which seniority, not quality or productivity, is the primary consideration, and where there is no real incentive for success or effort—will not be tolerated indefinitely.

In spite of floundering by some privateers, New York City is considering turning over 50 of its schools to private management; and after proposal requests went out to 100 private management firms, fifteen responded with specific proposals. The privatized schools will be free from many of the state and local regulations that govern the regular public schools.

What is interesting is that Boston University, which has been managing the Chelsea, Mass. school system since 1989, is the only University that has opted to manage a school district. It demanded and got carte blanche to reform as it pleased. In eight years, the system's dropout rate declined from 20 percent to 8 percent and scores went up for seniors taking the SAT. However, fourth-grade test scores have not changed because most children stay in bilingual classes until grade three, limiting their test-taking abilities.

America is not alone in its attempts to reform education through privatization. A radical approach is being considered in Britain for schools that aren't performing well. Private firms are being invited to take part in creating 25 education action zones each with about 20 schools in areas where pupils do badly. The schools in the action zones would be allowed to drop the national curriculum and the national agreement on teachers pay and conditions.

What is hard to understand is that since regulations are viewed as a wall preventing educational reforms, here and abroad, why not eliminate or reduce them for the public schools as well? Right now, it's not a level playing field.

Educational governance is also a problem. A draft document by the Education Commission of the States characterizes "education governance as fragmented and that political feasibility, rather than educational optimization, becomes the driving force in policy adoption."

The National Commission on Governing America's Schools has issued a report which minces no words in its quest for reforming the schools. Among its approaches is that "public authorities would fund and oversee the performance of schools but not directly operate them…districts would contract with nonprofit and for profit organizations to run them."

Whether privatization will fizzle or flourish is too early to predict, but it certainly will continue and warrant further scrutinity.

Topic 11

CLASS SIZE

Part I—Is Reduction Rational or Risky?

Probably no other issue in education has received so much attention in recent times as that of class size reduction (CSR). It's the newest trend to transform schools—parents, educators, and even politicians are clamoring for smaller classes--and at least 27 states are involved in one way or another in CSR efforts. Yet, research is very controversial and confusing (more than 1,000 studies on class size offer mixed and contradictory findings) and billions of dollars are at stake. In fact, CSR has become so politicized that it's hard to find the facts. So what's the real story concerning class size reduction? Is it a rational approach to improving schools or is it very risky? Let's begin the journalistic journey into the quagmire of this very emotionally charged topic where perceptions and politics may be far more powerful than reality. In considering a CSR program, states and school districts must resolve a number of issues.

First there must be some consensus on what size class is most effective (U.S. Department of Education surveys indicate that teachers with fewer than 24 students do not see class size as a major problem, and those with more than 24 do); at what grade levels (kindergarten has the most potential); for what type of students (minority students improve the most), and even for which subjects (reading classes are the key).

Second, there must be an agreement on the desired goal for reducing class size. Is it to increase student achievement, reduce the workload of teachers, give more individual attention to students, create a more manageable classroom, placate parents, and pander to politicians or all of these—and more?

Third, what will it cost to reduce class size, and what has it cost so far? There are estimates that boggle the mind and the pocketbook as well. Reducing class size by 10 students nationally would cost around 85 billions dollars for teachers alone not counting school construction and related costs (most of the cost would be borne by school districts). In the past 30 years, school spending has increased over 60% beyond inflation, and average class sizes have dropped from 30 to 23 (this was the magic number not long ago). Yet, according to Tom Dawson, Pacific Research Institute, "while class sizes have dropped indicators of academic progress have declined."

Fourth, even if the will and dollars are available to reduce class size (to what magic number no one really knows), are there enough teachers available now and will there be enough available in the future? The current and predicted shortage of teachers nationwide seems to be of little concern.

Fifth, how many more classrooms and schools will be needed to reduce class sizes from their current numbers (numbers vary state to state ranging from 30:1 in California to 20:4 in Vermont)?

Lastly, do teachers teach differently and more effectively, and do students achieve more in smaller classes? Unfortunately, studies have found that many teachers do not adjust their teaching styles with smaller classes. According to Acting Deputy Under Secretary of Education Marshall Smith, "Teachers have to do something different with it (smaller classes)—they can't just stand up in front of the class and put things on the blackboard." In other words, teachers need to be trained in small classroom strategies if CSR is to be effective.

Tennessee started the CSR ball rolling in 1985 with their STAR program. Three-thousand K-3 students were randomly assigned to classrooms of different sizes—one third between 13-17 students, one third between 22-25 students, and one third in regular size classrooms but with a full-time aide. After three years, test results were higher for those students who had been in the smaller classes. But very important to realize is that the smaller classes benefited students from low-income families most, middle-class kids less, and those from upper-income backgrounds least of all; and the significant gains occurred in kindergarten. It's also interesting to note that there were some long-term effects. When these students were followed into high school, they had fewer retentions, dropouts, suspensions and absences. In addition, they took more advanced courses, and scored higher than their peers in English, math and science. However, it is not clear which students benefited most.

One of the more ambitious efforts to reduce class size is taking place in California where class sizes are limited to 20 students in grades K-3. It required the addition of 18,000 classrooms and thousands of teachers (almost one-quarter of the new hires had no teaching credentials). The initial bill was 2.5 billion dollars, and costs will continue to increase as 15,000 more teachers are added and salaries climb.

However, "peaches and cream" in one district may be "sour apples" in another. The wealthier districts have raided the poorer districts for experienced teachers leaving the poorer districts to hire unqualified and inexperienced teachers. For this reason, the Annenberg Institute claims the CSR program actually harms--not helps--poor children. In other words, is it better to have an experienced teacher teaching 25 or an inexperienced and/or unqualified teacher teaching 20?

Thousands of portable classrooms were added which eliminated playground space; and, non-classroom space in schools was cannibalized to make room for the smaller classes. In addition, some "slight-of-hand" took place in some schools where 40 students were assigned in a single room with two teachers who then traded off teaching the entire group of 40 students. Some schools even assigned three classes to two rooms, with each class rotating in and out during the day. Yet, in spite of many problems, parents, politicians, and educators generally laud the initiative and what they see as positive results.

SAGE is a Wisconsin CSR program limiting class size to 15 in grades K-3. It was initiated in 1996 as a pilot to provide resources for 30 schools that enrolled predominately low-income students (it is now a statewide program). Although SAGE claims that test results were impressive for children in the smaller classes, The Wisconsin Policy Research Institute found that very little academic research could show any significant gains even for minority children. In addition, "class size reductions achieved through the SAGE program have not been as significant as is commonly argued and assumed." And a disturbing statement in the WPRI report charges "repeated suppression of the negative or ambiguous findings from the SAGE program."

The problem for states and communities considering CSR programs is to research how and under what circumstances does class size make a difference, what are the immediate and long-term costs and benefits, and to make comparisons with other effective and less costly alternatives—none are easy tasks.

Part II—Is The Research Responsible or Rabid?

There is a federal initiative to add 100,000 teachers to reduce class size in grades 1 through 3 to a nationwide average of 18, as well as, a school construction program to modernize or build 5,000 schools—certainly not enough to house the teachers being added. But should this be the role of the federal government that, interestingly, has no Constitutional authority for education? More importantly, is the effort based on sound research or is it just "feel-good" politics?

James Coleman, a sociologist, once pointed out that policymakers often use research on education to legitimize, not to guide, their policies. Casey Lartigue Jr., of the Cato Institute, points out in Politicizing Class Size that "pronouncements coming from the political leadership of federal departments are notorious for serving the interests of the party in the White House." For example, in 1988 the U.S. Office of Education concluded that "reducing class sizes would be expensive and probably a waste of money and effort." Yet, a report just released by the U.S. Office of Education, The Class Size Reduction Program, states that "a growing body of well-designed research is confirming the conventional wisdom that small classes are effective in helping to improve academic achievement." It's important to note that this report does not provide any class size research studies to support its conclusion--rather unusual to say the least.

Perhaps what is far more interesting is House Bill 4875 that has received unanimous bipartisan committee support. It is designed to "fix education research which is broken in our country…and to make it more independent of political influence." In other words, under the current system, there is so much political influence tainting federal education research, it can no longer be trusted.

Dr. Eric A. Hanushek (University of Rochester public-policy professor), a leading critic of CSR efforts, believes that the federal government is in a unique position to initiate programs that promise true improvement in our schools--not programs that mandate or push local schools to adopt particular approaches. A very productive use of state and federal funds would be to conduct a series of planned interventions that evaluate improvement efforts and incentives because nobody in today's schools has much of an incentive to improve student performance. He analyzed 300 CSR studies and concluded that "across-the-board reductions in class size are not worth the expense and that existing evidence indicates that achievement for the typical student will be unaffected by instituting the types of class size reductions that have been proposed."

However, an article by Gerald Bracey, Distortion and Disinformation About Class Size Reduction disagrees with Hanushek's conclusion because "he used primitive technology rarely used in empirical research." Bracey believes that small class sizes do, in fact, produce better outcomes. There is one problem with his research because it refers primarily to studies where class sizes were below 15, and there are few such examples or studies. Neither does he review other programs that may produce better results at far less cost.

What needs to be understood is that just reducing class size alone will probably not produce the desired results unless it is part of an overall plan. As an example, 16 low-income schools in Austin, Texas, were given $300,000 each for five years. Fourteen schools used the funds to reduce class size, but after five years did not manage to improve achievement. Two schools also spent the money to reduce class size but, in addition, set higher standards, provided intensive professional development for teachers, and created health clinics. After five years, these two schools improved achievement dramatically.

Professor Robert Slavin (Johns Hopkins University) believes that only targeted classes need to be smaller. He claims that the California CSR effort could have improved achievement dramatically for a fraction of the money. How? By hiring instructors to reduce the size of reading classes only. There seems to be good evidence that using smaller classes selectively produces the biggest-bang-for-the-buck.

Montgomery County (Virginia) is being selective with its CSR program. Rather than reducing all class sizes, 238 teachers are being added for elementary reading, middle school math, and high school algebra. This plan will reduce the average class size ratio of these classes to 15:1.

Research conducted by Ronald Ferguson, a lecturer at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government, shows that "teacher quality, not class size is the most important factor in education." The Wisconsin Policy Research Institute also arrived at the same conclusion: "There is growing academic research showing that the real key to improving the learning skills of all our children -- and especially our minority children – is strong, quality teachers."

CSR critics offer other strategies such as cooperative learning, adding aides and special teachers to focus on helping students in need, and providing early childhood programs. In fact, keeping schools operating 12 months of the year, with a fourth of the children on vacation at any one time, would reduce class size and not require additional classroom construction. The same ends would be achieved at far less cost and much more quickly.

Critics of class size reduction programs point out some other interesting issues. How do parochial schools educate disadvantaged urban students in classes averaging 30 much more successfully than do the public schools? Is it because there are fewer regulations, much better discipline, higher expectations, a value-centered culture, and a clear and focused mission? And why is it that other countries with class sizes of 30 to 40 students consistently outscore U.S. students on standardized tests? Fourth-grade students in Singapore, South Korea, Japan, and Hong Kong have large math classes and teachers typically rely on whole-class instruction and independent seatwork; yet, fourth graders in those four countries scored highest on recently released TIMMS (Third International Math and Science Study) results.

Sonia Hernandez, deputy superintendent California State Department of Education, made an interesting observation: "As for schools in high-achieving nations, we actually visited classrooms in Japan and Singapore. In the lower grades, their schools do have fairly small class sizes (e.g., 15 students), particularly in urban areas. This is so even though their average seems to indicate a class size much higher. Also, the students are largely passive in that their role is to listen and to follow the teacher's directions."

Just reducing class size, of course, cannot influence academic achievement directly. It must first influence what teachers and students do in the classroom before it can possibly affect student learning. What is discouraging and deplorable is that so much of the research seems devoid of any ethical and professional standards; in other words, it’s much more rabid than responsible.

Topic 12

IS BILINGUAL EDUCATION PABLUM OR PERVERSION?

According to a new report from the READ Institute, "English-learners may be better off in a one-year English-immersion program than an extended bilingual education program." Of course, this conflicts with most current practices of providing a lengthy program (3-7 years) in bilingual education classes of one type or another. The fact is that bilingual education has become a national industry comprising upwards of 200,000 staff and billions of dollars. Nationwide, there are almost 4,000,000 students involved in a variety of bilingual programs and the numbers are increasing daily.

Bilingual programs began with the passage of Title VII in 1968 even though there was no research to support this federal effort; it was simply "feel good politics" at work. Since that time, "the search for some proof that these programs actually work continues with little success."

This is another tortuous education issue that has its adamantine (stubborn) advocates and obstinate opponents. This is not surprising considering that it is mired in conflicting and confusing research, numerous court cases, federal fervor (perhaps folly), program proliferation, and dozens of definitions. Dandy Daddy (U.S. Office of Education) defined bilingual education in 1970 to mean: "Instruction in two languages and the use of those two languages and mediums of instruction for any part or all of the school curriculum." That's probably why the English First Foundation concluded that "bilingual education is a term which means different things to different people, and it has different meanings in different states."

This debate reached a climax when Proposition 227 was passed in California (1998) to replace bilingual programs for limited-English-proficient (LEP) students with structured English-immersion programs—a real defiance of federal policy. However, standardized testing that followed up the immersion program found that "all grade levels showed improvement and the greatest gains were made in school districts that implemented the most intensive English-immersion program…LEP students mastered English in one year." It should come as no surprise that these results are being challenged with a vengeance; after all, thousands of jobs, political power-dollars, and research reputations are at stake.

But California is no longer alone; Arizona just passed its own ballot initiative (Proposition 203) to eliminate bilingual programs. It was initiated by former bilingual education supporters who were exasperated in their attempts to get changes made in bilingual education. One supporter summed up the issue by saying: "Minority children will at last taste the equal opportunity to achieve equal education in the public schools." State education officials in Texas have an opposing view and cite improved minority performance on standardized tests as the major reason for backing--not eliminating--bilingual education.

The Linguistic Minority Research Institute claims that it takes an average child up to five years or longer to learn English—the basis for traditional bilingual programs. To supporters this lengthy process sustains the language culture in mind and spirit—a pablum approach. To opponents, it is perversion--a corrupt usage of a program that has a top priority of preserving the language culture rather than teaching English. In other words, is it the responsibility of the schools to preserve the cultures of over 100 different languages (an impossible task) or is it the responsibility of each family?

New York public school educators are really unsure about what to do in spite of the fact that there are numerous examples of non-public schools in New York City using English-immersion programs very successfully. One example is St. Rose of Lima grammar school with 97% Latinos (Spanish is the primary language spoken at home) and 93% of the students fall below the income guidelines for the school lunch program—double the average of the public schools. Yet, students attain English fluency within two years. Most of the Latinos fled the public schools because they were not learning English even after two years in a bilingual program; in fact, their former public school classmates still flounder in bilingual programs after five years.

How high does the level of stupidity have to rise before changing 30 years of a failed program? Well, at least higher than the level of the U.S. Office of Bilingual Education whose steadfast position is that it takes five-seven years to master academic English. Perhaps they should review the test results of St. Rose where the students outperform the public schools on standardized tests that require "academic English" skills to be successful.

Why this intransigent position by Dandy Daddy? The answer is simple! If bilingual programs were eliminated, would there be a need for a Bilingual Education Office?

However, Dandy Daddy must share the podium with the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences whose stance is that rather than continuing to debate whether bilingual education is effective, "future research should focus on pinpointing features of effective programs." What more research is needed? Isn't the California success (and others) involving thousands of children in short-term English-immersion programs demonstrating a more effective program?

Interestingly, there is nothing really new about bilingual programs. In 1839, Ohio became the first state to adopt a bilingual education law for German-English instruction. Louisiana enacted similar legislation for French in 1847; and in 1850, New Mexico Territory did so for Spanish. However, during the decade of World War I a majority of states enacted English-only instruction to "Americanize" the immigrant groups; some went so far as to ban the study of foreign languages--a restriction that was struck down as unconstitutional in 1923.

`Connecticut schools are obligated to provide bilingual programs under the provisions of PA 99-221, but students are limited to 30 months in such a program, and they must meet the state English mastery standard by the time of exit. What happens if the English standard is not achieved? Students must still leave the program, but they are provided with language transition support services.

A little irony exists in all of the bilingual debates raging throughout the country. In Oregon, parents are enrolling their children in pre-school Spanish-immersion classes. Why? A foreign language is now a requirement in the schools; and beginning in 2005, the University of Oregon will require a foreign language for admission.

However, there is a rather pathetic side to the bilingual education issue and it's summarized most succinctly by the Education Policy Institute: "The public cannot rely on the educational establishment, including its research arm, for sound advice on educational issues. The discrediting of the bilingual education lobby is the latest and most obvious evidence that supports this conclusion." There is only one problem—the battle and debate is far from over.

Topic 13

READING

Part I-- Is there a best way to teach reading?

The deafening debate heard from coast to coast for more than three decades is whether whole language (progressive approach) or phonics (conservative approach) is more effective in teaching reading. The debate (educational, philosophical and political) is rooted in the "growing incidence of reading problems and learning disabilities."

A recent Phi Delta Kappan article, Sixty Years of Reading Research, is emphatic in its conclusion that "the research overwhelmingly favors holistic, literature-centered approach to reading. Indeed, the proof is massive and overwhelming." Wow, that should settle the debate. Well, not quite!

E. D. Hirsch, author of The Schools We Need and Why We don't Have Them, repudiates the hundreds of studies cited in the research reviewed in the PDK article. He states: "The consensus in research is that the reviews are worst practice, not 'best practice.' " Isn't it amazing how the same research can be interpreted by experts and scholars in two totally different ways?

However, his view is supported by a new report from the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, Whole Language Lives On. "Reading isn't being handled well in American schools. Four in ten of our fourth-graders lack basic reading skills." Could it be that they were never taught to read? Of course not, all schools "teach" reading. The problem is that too many children still don't "learn" to read.

For example, the report goes on to state that "we also know what doesn't work for most children—whole language." "It persists despite efforts by policy-makers and reading experts to root it out." Clearly, this report debunks whole language instruction.

So here we go again—stumbling and mumbling through the briar patch—with the thorns of contradictory research giving educators and parents painful anxiety in trying to understand why there is still no consensus about the best way to teach reading.

Just what is the difference between whole language and phonics? Whole language, widely used in the primary grades, is based on the theory that "meaning and purpose" should be emphasized in early reading instruction by teaching reading using literature--real books for real purposes. The basic premise of this philosophy is that children supposedly process the printed word and comprehend it like adults—a rather natural process (this is not substantiated by research).

In contrast phonics, which whole language enthusiasts describe as drab, boring, and repetitive, requires systematic skill building in sound-symbol relationships in order to decode--sound out--words. These are essential skills that must be developed for effective reading because reading, unlike speech, is not a natural process and must be taught, supported, and sustained.

Couldn't this debate be resolved by using a combination of both methods? That's exactly what's happening—the "balanced" approach. However, according to the Fordham report, "with such an approach, the worst practices of whole language are persisting, continuing to inflict boundless harm on young children."

There is another study that may help to shed light on this incredibly complex issue. The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) is supporting a rigorous approach to reviewing the reading research.

"It requires careful planning, involves many disciplines, recognizes the importance of testing competing theories, includes large samples…relies on a range of carefully developed measures, and implements long-term treatments (5 years of age until 23 years of age)."

It's conducted by over 100 researchers in education, psychology, linguistics and medicine at 18 research sites in the United States, and has produced over 2,000 journal articles and books since 1965. This is an extraordinary effort to find the "magic key" to unlock the mystery of teaching reading.

Among the findings in its America Reads Challenge report is that "The ability to process sounds that are heard—the ability to remember, imitate, recall, manipulate, recode, and articulate sounds (phonetic skills) consistently differentiates good readers and poor readers." Most significant and a rather startling conclusion is that developing such ability is not dependent on intelligence or parent education. This is contrary to "popular" perceptions and beliefs about what influences reading success.

Another report just released by the National Reading Panel, Teaching Children to Read, supports the NICHD findings. The panel was charged with determining the effectiveness of various types of reading instruction; and, to accomplish the task, it claims to have reviewed over 100,000 published studies. Interestingly, "The panel found its charge so daunting at times that it despaired of being able to meet it in a reasonable way." But it too concluded that "systematic, explicit phonics should be a routine part of reading instruction for all elementary students…and it should begin in kindergarten."

So the evidence seems substantial that phonics is the critical component in teaching and learning reading in the early grades. Yet, whole language or "balance" continues to be embraced by school districts, state education agencies and federal agencies.

However when poor reading scores finally become so conspicuous, as they did in California, reality and panic finally prove overwhelming and result in radical change. In a dramatic and bold move, California lawmakers literally dumped whole language in favor of a phonics approach. Resistance has been fierce and the heart of the resistance is--guess where--the state universities "whose faculties have denounced the legislative changes."

What must be understood is that many whole-language enthusiasts have always advocated teaching phonics (balance), but too often implementation was too "loosey-goosey." "Balance" requires teaching phonetic skills systematically and early prior to intense whole-language instruction.

The problem is that the debate may be about "methods," but the underlying cause is a philosophical battle between two opposing camps relating to matters of teaching and learning, of child development, and of

human nature. Perhaps the concentration should be on “learning”—crafting instruction to meet students’ needs.

There was an attempt to bring a peaceful resolution to this raging debate. The National Research Council assembled a panel of reading experts for a “peace conference.” After negotiations concluded, they appealed for an end to the squabbling and endorsed a “balanced” approach. But “no early peace should be expected because the differences over literacy are part of deep, divergent, and irreconcilable conflicts about people, social purposes, resources, and power.” Too bad it’s not about kids!

Part II—Is The Reading Debate Masking the Real Problems?

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is the nation’s only ongoing survey of what students know and can do in various academic subjects in grades 4, 8 and 12. The assessment includes four reading categories: below basic, at or above basic, at or above proficient, and advanced. It is interesting to note that there is no definition for "below basic;" but the definition for "basic" level is "partial mastery of the knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work at a given grade." Therefore, doesn’t it seem prudent to assume that "below basic" must indicate "little or no mastery?"

Sorry to be a little technical, but it is important to know definitions in order to analyze and understand test data which is the key to unlocking the mystery of why reading remains badly wounded and stranded on the academic battlefield.

The latest results (1998) in reading reveal that nationally 38% of 4th graders (41% male, 35% female), 26% of 8th graders (32% male, 19% female), and 23% of 12th graders (30% male, 17% female) scored "below basic" skills. "At all grades and for all levels, the reading performance of female students exceeded that of their male peers." Obviously, gender is an absolutely critical factor in examining test data; boys, like it or not, learn differently than girls. In fact, the average score for male 12th graders was lower than that in 1992; so boys are regressing rather than progressing. The alarm bells are ringing, but it doesn’t seem like anyone is listening?

According to a Chicago Tribune article, Schools Pay New Attention to Boys, "…many educators are reaching the same conclusion: boys are in crisis in America’s classrooms." Educators know that boys account for the overwhelming majority of behavior problems, dominate special education (primarily because of reading problems), and increasing numbers are on medication."

Doesn’t this all suggest that something is seriously wrong? Yet, the reading methods and strategies are the same for both. Gender-neutral classrooms may serve the need for "political correctness," but it does not meet the needs of boys or, for that matter, society. Unfortunately, this problem alone doesn’t tell the whole story.

When ethnic groups are compared, it reveals a far more alarming picture of reading performance across Education America. For example, in 8th grade, 18% of Whites, 18% of Asians, 39% of American Indians, 46% of Hispanics, and 47% of Blacks scored "below basic." If "basic level" is included, just under 90% of minorities do not achieve at "proficient level" skills. Shouldn’t better results be expected after eight years of schooling? And since reading is recognized as a skill basic to virtually all learning, isn’t it logical to conclude that minorities are programmed for academic failure? How much longer can society afford to tolerate such disparity in reading achievement?

So the reading debate about which method is most effective to teach reading without regard to gender or ethnicity is really insane and mindless to put it in the bluntest possible terms. It simply does not address reality; but, more importantly, it is masking—not solving--the real problems.

The focus must be on finding the most effective way to teach reading to boys and minorities. After all, they are the ones stigmatized by the educational system, and they bear the brunt and consequences of school failure; and, eventually, so does society.

But why is this issue ignored professionally and politically? Simple, the jaundiced judicial system, legislative lunacy, and "political correctness" require "equality" in order to give the "appearance" of preventing discrimination.

Make no mistake about it, this is discrimination at its worst! How can the quest for equality be achieved when the results are dramatically unequal? Isn't being trapped in the "bondage of illiteracy" the most intolerable and vicious form of discrimination?

Still more distressing is other test data indicating that "since 1980 there has been no improvement in average reading scores for 9 and 13 year-olds." Considering the fact that the past two decades have been a period of time in which class sizes have been lowered, standards were identified and raised, teacher training was intensified, and increased dollars were allocated, it's obvious that such factors have had no positive impact on improving reading results. What apparently did not change were attitudes, practices, and perceptions.

Important to remember is that, according to the research, the ability (to learn reading) is not dependent on intelligence or parent education. Yet, the NAEP assessment seems somewhat contradictory since "students who reported higher levels of parent education had higher average reading scores." What the results probably indicate is that parent education is not dependent on the ability to learn basic reading, but rather that it propels basic reading skills to much higher levels.

There is yet another problem which is that teachers are not really conscious of the gender and ethnic issues nor are they trained adequately to provide remedial reading instruction in the regular K-12 classrooms. Of course, there are reading specialists, but not enough—nor will there ever be--to provide remediation for roughly half the minority student population. Like it or not, the regular classroom teachers at all grade levels must take on far more responsibility for recognizing and remediating reading problems; but, it is not happening.

The need for teacher training is being recognized. The Reading Excellence Act, under consideration in Congress, would provide $210 million dollars for professional development as a way to improve children's reading skills and abilities.

There is also another initiative on the congressional agenda--America Reads--which calls for an army of volunteers to help children learn to read. This approach is contrary to the National Research Council's (NRC) report on reading confirming that quality teaching from trained professionals--not untrained volunteers or tutors—is the single best defense against reading failure.

However, unless the training is substantial and ongoing, particularly with respect to ethnic groups and boys, such "training" will not produce the desired result. In addition, and most important, training must translate to application and practice in the classroom. Finally, there must be effective supervision and monitoring—not just an occasional teacher evaluation observation--to insure that the training is, in fact, reinforced in the classroom.

Another important issue not addressed vigorously enough is that many, if not most, of the reading problems can be prevented through early intervention. Part of the research by the National Institute of Child Health centered on an analysis of the bottom 20% with serious reading difficulties. Their conclusion was that this group lacked phonetic skills, and that identification, diagnosis and intervention must occur early (prior to grade 3) to be most effective.

Of course, the facts can continue to be ignored, but they cannot be denied. However, if the problems are to be solved, the facts and reality must be confronted with common-sense action rather than abdication.

Part III—Why Was CT Crowned The Reading Champ?

Since 1992, Connecticut has had the highest reading achievement scores on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) reading exam and it is the most improved state in reading scores. As a result of being "crowned the reading champion", the National Education Goals Panel commissioned a study to determine what Connecticut was doing right that could account for its success. The report, Exploring High and Improving Reading Achievement in Connecticut, looked at a variety of statewide factors.

Before getting to the findings of the study, just how well did Connecticut perform on the 1998 assessment? In grade 4, it had the highest average score for public school students with 46% scoring at or above proficiency. However, in spite of the constant improvement, only 55% of Whites, 17% of Hispanics, and 13% of Blacks achieved at or above proficiency. In Connecticut's major cities, only 21% achieved at the proficiency level or above (compared with 25% nationally) which means that 79% scored at the basic level or below. Rural towns did much better with students scoring 57% at or above proficiency. What is also significant is that grade 4 scores improved while national scores stayed rather stable.

In grade 8, 42% scored at or above proficiency with 50% of Whites, 16% of Hispanics, and 10% of Blacks scoring at that level; the scores were lower than those in 4th grade. In the major cities, only 20% scored at proficiency or above (compared with 29% nationally), and in the rural towns 50% scored at that level.

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The test result disparities help to explain what has been termed the "two Connecticuts—urban and suburban." But more importantly, it demonstrates that results must be analyzed in terms of gender (females continued to outperform males) and ethnic factors--using total average scores only masks the problems that exist.

Although Connecticut should certainly take pride in being "crowned" for its improved reading growth, it cannot take much pride in the fact that urban students remain far behind. Obviously, the crown has some gold glitter on it, but it's also covered with too many "chads." So what were some of the findings of the study?

The "popular" perception is that parental income and education, low class size, and teacher pay are responsible for higher performance --Connecticut is one of the highest ranked states in these categories. However, the study found that although these factors are associated with higher achievement, they did not account for the improved results. This finding is given credence because, as an example, Maine matched Connecticut in the percentage of students in grade 8 at or above proficiency; yet, both states are dramatically different in parental income and education, class size, and teacher pay.

In addition, between 1992-1998 the median income in the state decreased in both absolute terms and relative to other states, there were more persons above the poverty level, and there was a higher percentage of Black and Hispanic students. It was also found that the total amount of instructional time—not just reading time--was not a factor either since thirty-two states had more hours of instruction than Connecticut.

If these factors then are not critical in contributing to reading growth, what does make the difference? The conclusion of the study was that improvement could only be related to what the schools did in terms of policies and practices. This is really a very significant finding because both of these factors are in control of the school; yet, popular belief is that schools are hampered in their ability to improve achievement because of "outside" and "uncontrollable" factors such as parent wealth and education.

Among the key practices considered critical were a balanced reading program (providing that phonics was stressed in the early grades), on-going assessments, early identification, and the use of a variety of intervention strategies; again, all are in control of the school.

Specifically, districts with improved reading scores credit the State's accountability initiatives such as the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT); references with state and national educational groups; allocation of extra resources to the neediest schools; and on-going teacher support. In fact, Connecticut had one of the highest percentages of teachers participating in professional development.

An independent analysis of the study determined that "Connecticut is collecting and using data on student achievement in a way that is informative and helpful to those who must implement the policies; and, the state is actually using the data to improve policy and ultimately, student outcomes."

Can the consistent growth in scores be sustained in the future? There is no way to know for certain; but since the study, Connecticut has put in place other practices and policies that should continue to enhance reading and achievement growth.

The neediest districts now have available School Readiness and Preschool grants, Early Reading Success grants, Educational Accountability and Summer School grants, expansion of Family Resource Center grants, and the Governor's Summer Reading Challenge program.

In addition, a three-year reading plan is now required of every school district (PA 98-243). A letter addressing the legislation was sent to all school districts; but, interestingly, no mention was made about gender or ethnic issues.

An Early Reading Success Panel was created (PA 99-227) "to identify the knowledge and skills important for teachers in the primary grades to teach reading." Again, there was no mention of gender or ethnic issues. A comprehensive document, Improving Reading Competency for Students in the Primary

Grades was also prepared and distributed to all schools. And again, there was no mention of gender or ethnic issues.

"The current challenge is to do what is right even better, and to be open to new approaches as they are tried and researched." With continued emphasis on improving reading policies and practices, the reading crown should shed more "chads" and take on more "glitter." However, if all the chads are to be shed, gender and ethnic issues must be openly recognized and addressed with vigor and determination. So far, it doesn't seem to be happening!

Topic 14

IS SCHOOL QUALITY A QUEST OR QUAGMIRE?

Each year, Education Weekly attempts to publicize the quest for school quality by compiling a very comprehensive research report entitled "Quality Counts." The current report, "Quality Counts 2001, grades the states using four "quality" indicators: standards and accountability, teacher quality, school climate, and resources. How did the states do across these indicators? Well, it's certainly not a "quality" report card since the average score was a C minus.

How did Connecticut fare? Surprisingly and sadly, no indicator received and "A" grade. It did receive a grade of B minus for improving standards and accountability, but nineteen states did better. The effort to improve teacher quality received a B grade with only one state graded higher--North Carolina (no states received an A). And although only a grade of B was received for improving school climate, it ranked number one of all the states (no state received an A).

Where Connecticut faltered very badly was in providing equitable financial resources in which it received a D (forty-four states scored higher). What this indicator compares is how much spending differs across all districts in the state; a low grade indicates great variation among the districts.

Of course, the assumption is that these four indicators are considered important in achieving positive academic results. But are they?

On the National Assessment of Educational Progress test Connecticut and Maine were tied in 8th grade reading placing them in first place among the states. Since they scored the same and the highest, it would be expected that they would both be graded about the same in the four indicators.

How was Maine graded? It received a C in standards (twenty-seven states did better), a D for teacher quality (forty states did better), a C plus in school climate (ranking it second among the states), and D plus for providing equitable financial resources (forty-two states did better).

However, since the report does not demonstrate a strong correlation between the indicators and test results, it would seem that "Quality Counts" has created a quality quagmire for itself.

What quality indicators do successful schools have in common? Two research groups, the Education Trust and the Heritage Foundation, studied academically outstanding schools to find some answers. The common traits were high expectations, monitored testing systems, extra instruction for low-performing students, professional development focused on teaching academic standards, and parent involvement that emphasized standards and achievement—very specific rather than general indicators.

The impact of such practices can be demonstrated in looking at two high poverty schools. The first is the Millard Hensley Elementary School in Kentucky that has 94% of its students qualifying for subsidized school lunches; yet, it scored the highest in the state for 4th grade science. The second is the Carl Waitz Elementary School in Texas where 100 percent of the students passed the state reading and mathematics tests; yet, its student population is overwhelmingly poor and Hispanic.

What seems clear is that implementing the "right" quality practices will result in high achievement even in schools with high proportions of poor and minority children. And it is important to note that financial resources, lower class size, and teacher pay were not listed as quality indicators.

It should be obvious that focusing on the right school practices is the key to getting quality results; unfortunately, the focus in most states is to lower class size, increase teacher salaries, and provide more funding.

There were still other disturbing aspects of the report. Although forty states reported having tests aligned with their standards, an analysis by ACHIEVE, a standards-based school improvement group, found that the match between state standards and tests is not close enough. In addition, the state tests were found to measure some standards but not others. Most shocking, however, was their finding that the state tests emphasized the less demanding knowledge and skills in state standards. A good example of this practice was the Connecticut Mastery Test writing exam in which spelling and grammar was not evaluated as part of the grade. Another interesting finding was that the U.S. standards are far less rigorous when compared to the standards in other countries.

So the problem is not only that the standards are not rigorous enough, but the tests themselves are designed to measure lower rather than the higher standards. This is certainly not the way to measure "quality" or to achieve quality results.

What is more disturbing in the report is that although standards are beginning to find their way into classrooms, "those classrooms still look much as they did 10 years ago." In fact it was ten years ago that a panel of experts concluded: "In the absence of well-defined and demanding standards, education has gravitated toward…curricula focusing on low-level reading and arithmetic skills and on small amounts of factual material in other content areas." Apparently, little has changed.

The report itself goes on to conclude: "States must strike a better balance among standards, assessments, and the tools students and schools need to succeed." True enough, but what is also needed are rigorous standards that will be accurately reflected in the test results.

Incidentally, the report received little, if any, media attention (except for this newspaper) and, unfortunately, this is true of most education reports. But even when such reports do get attention, they are never analyzed. Yet the media has no problem in devoting pages upon pages describing every detail of sports news along with extensive analysis. Clearly, the rhetoric that education is a priority resonates very loudly

throughout the land, but the media does not see it as newsworthy or believes that the public is not interested —both are serious misconceptions; and it's one reason why education remains in a quality quagmire.

The fact is that education consumers, the general public and parents, are deeply and genuinely interested in education and this is substantiated by numerous surveys. But how can quality education decisions be made at the school, community, state, and national level when the education consumers are not informed about relevant education information?

The quest for quality will not succeed until the media assumes far more responsibility for reporting and analyzing critical education information—not just education news. Of course, the partners in this effort are the school officials and policymakers who must, in their quest for quality, study and analyze the information to determine which school and classroom practices must be changed.

Another serious problem is that the demands being placed on testing simply exceed the technology being used for scoring. For example, in Minnesota 8,000 high school students were told they had failed the math portion of state test when, in fact, they had not. If quality is to be measured accurately, the technology and practices must be reliable.

Topic 15

HIGH SCHOOL

Part I--Are High Schools Frozen In A Time Warp?

According to a new report, High Schools of the Millennium, "…the world around us continues to change at unprecedented rates, but most high schools have been slow or resistant to change." It goes on to conclude that the high school experience no longer can be limited to learning that occurs only inside a traditional school building. Schools must respond and adapt to the changing environment, but they cannot do it alone. Communities and parents must also participate more actively to help schools in the change process.

This report, prepared by the American Youth Policy Forum, urges that high schools be "completely redesigned;" and it builds on yet another report prepared by the National Association of Secondary Schools Principals, Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution.

What are some of the issues identified in the report to justify the need for high school change? First, "serious problems of student achievement exist in high-poverty schools…and those in suburban and rural areas are not adding enough value to the learning experience" to keep pace with the demands of today's society and economy. Second, high schools are dominated by lecture-style classes where the content is divorced from the real world. Technology and the amount of information available to students change the traditional notion of where and how learning happens and how teachers teach. Third, students feel high school is irrelevant and boring. They are not able to connect what they are being taught with what they feel is needed for success in later life; as a result, there is a lack of student responsibility for learning.

There are some other issues to consider. One out of every four students drop out of high school before graduation; it's interesting to note that 80% of prison inmates do not have a high school diploma. In addition, although high schools typically boast of the graduates who go on to further education, on average, only 28 percent complete a bachelor's degree, and only 8 percent complete an associate's degree. And of those who go to college, approximately 30-50 percent must take remedial courses in basic subjects like English and algebra.

There are, of course, many obstacles high schools face even when there is a desire to change. One main obstacle is the turnover and politicization of leadership, particularly at the district and school level, that hampers systemic and long-term change. Another is that the culture of schools is to avoid risk. Added to these obstacles is that schools serve very diverse groups—ethnically, racially, economically, and politically. Bringing all such groups together to share a vision and agreeing on expectations is no easy task.

Another new report, The Lost Opportunity of Senior Year, uses stronger language to identify another obstacle: "American schools, families, and communities operate with an archaic view of the purposes of secondary education…and with a structure that began to set and harden as early as one-hundred years ago."

All of these reports are saying that the typical American high school is frozen in a time warp—still icebound in the agricultural-industrial mindset of fifty years ago.

One of the efforts to "thaw out" high schools is an initiative developed in 1996 by the U.S Office of Education—New American High Schools (NAHS)-- to identify leading edge, innovative schools whose whole-school reform efforts enable their students to excel. Since that time, 59 schools in the U.S. have been awarded the designation of "New American High School." These schools have achieved "higher SAT scores, higher graduation rates, lower dropout rates, and higher post-secondary attendance rates than most of the nation's high schools."

Pretty impressive results, but why only 59 high schools out of thousands? That's not very impressive. What really needs to be underscored about the NAHS initiative is that it is co-sponsored by the National Association of Secondary School Principals; so why aren't more high schools participating?

Perhaps one reason is that a school must apply and compete for being showcased as a New American High School, and it must demonstrate that it has indeed been "thawed out." This is accomplished by providing compelling evidence of innovative instructional techniques, creative integrated technology, tailored professional development for teachers and principals, community service, work-based learning experiences, and strong partnerships with parents, the community, and post-secondary institutions.

It is also important to note that the NAHS program does not require a high school to follow any particular model; local needs and resources rather than some external model drive a school interested in being "defrosted."

How many Connecticut schools have received the designation? None! How many have received honorable mention? None! Not very impressive!

Just what are the benefits of being designated a NAHS? Among the benefits are: national recognition, an opportunity to serve as a reform leader, access to technical and expert assistance, participation in a network with other New American High Schools, the opportunity to influence policy and practice at a state and federal level, and a small stipend for outreach to other schools. But far more important is that such schools stand out as models to other high schools that they need not remain frozen in a time warp; however, it does require effort and leadership.

Is this the only way to showcase an innovative and results oriented high school? Of course not! There are a variety of ways for any high school to melt the iceberg of tradition and time. But if such honest and best efforts prove effective in creating a Millennium high school, then why not be recognized for it as a New American High School?

What is really nice about the program is that everything has been done—the research, a step by step planning guide, and the opportunity to take a virtual tour of the showcased schools. In addition, the effort can be incorporated easily with any school reform or improvement models of which there are many.

Of course, if these reports—and others like it--are not read, discussed, and acted on by school administrators and policy-makers, it would be difficult for any high school frozen in a time warp to propel itself to become a 21st Century Millennium high school. It can be done and must be done, but it requires determined, focused, consistent and enlightened leadership.

Part II--What is a Millennium High School?

The heart of a Millennium High School is the process of engaging students and the community in a rigorous teaching and learning process. Sounds terrific, but just what does this mean?

The High School of the Millennium report spells out the details. It begins with a clear vision of the standards, expectations, and the educational experiences desired for all students. However, such a vision requires the participation of the entire community because without its support the vision will be diminished over time. The core of the vision must be based on a belief system that every student can achieve and has talents and abilities that can be developed provided that they receive appropriate support systems.

The school building can no longer be viewed as the sole place for learning. Learning must be viewed as occurring anytime, anywhere, at home, in the community, and at work settings. In addition, the learning process occurs in teams and independently with multiple means of assessment.

All students are expected to pursue a program that leads to high academic achievement and post-secondary education. This means that student counseling would take on a far more important and critical role.

Teaching and learning is competency-based, not time-based or credit-based. It recognizes that students master subject matter at different speeds and with different learning and teaching styles. The research is absolutely clear on this issue and all adults know this from their own school experience. Yet, the structure of high schools, frozen in time and tradition, has always demanded completion of "seatwork"--not mastery--during the traditional high school years; failure results in students being branded and stigmatized as "failures."

Another important feature is that all adults in the learning environment are responsible for finding ways to help students master rigorous academic work; students are provided opportunities for enrichment after school, on weekends, during the summer, and through extracurricular activities. And this must be coordinated with experience learning in the community, through work-based learning opportunities, service learning and/or volunteer activities.

The curriculum itself must is articulated and aligned with post-secondary institutions so that there is a seamless transition to further education.

Programs and policies allow students with the ability and interest to graduate early or later depending on their needs. This is already being done in Rochester, New York and Chicago schools—they broke the icemold of the time tradition.

Technology is integrated into the teaching and learning process allowing unlimited access to huge amounts of data and information. Innovative use is made of distance learning to bring in higher level or specialized courses from other schools, colleges, and from around the world. The Internet is used to establish communications with parents allowing them to access their child's school records, homework, and discussion with teachers.

The principal is the instructional leader and sets the tone for excellence. This is accomplished by creating an environment that encourages teachers and staff to constantly review and improve their

instructional strategies to help all students achieve. But it means that the principal must aggressively seek out the best information and practices that have proven results.

Teachers are paired and placed on teams with other teachers to promote interdisciplinary planning and professional support. Most important is that teachers are hired for full-time, year-round positions. Then, and only then, can they compare themselves to other professions, be treated as professionals, and be paid as professionals.

A variety of assessments are utilized with primary use made of diagnostic procedures to better understand what students do or do not know so that teaching methods and approaches are adapted to focus on changing student needs.

For graduation, each senior plans and completes a senior project demonstrating the student's proficiency and integrating and demonstrating several fields of knowledge and skills with community members participating in approving and reviewing such projects.

The structure and organization of the school is designed to provide small, personalized, and caring 'learning communities.' These smaller groupings are based on academic or other interests e.g. science and technology, performing arts, etc. or broad career themes around an entire industry or cluster of industries. At the same time, such arrangements are flexible to allow students to move from one cluster to another.

Time is used differently to allow for block or modified block scheduling so that students become more actively engaged in their learning. In addition, starting and ending times vary allowing for more flexible scheduling. Most important is that students are allowed to take on-line classes that can be accessed anytime of day and any day of the week (fifteen percent of high school students take courses on-line).

There are, of course, other features of the Millennium High School, but it's obvious that many changes will be required in policies and practices. However, such changes must be part of a comprehensive strategic plan developed in conjunction with the community. In addition, each change must be given a cost or savings estimate along with a time schedule for implementation. The one costly item would be hiring teachers on a full-year basis. Even this can be done creatively by having two separate career pay scales—9 months and 12 months.

Does it all sound like utopia? To those who have been frozen in a time warp of tradition, it will be seen as impossible. Is it doable? Yes, because the choice not to change is really not an option. The global environment, society and the workplace are all changing at warp speeds and schools must move accordingly; if not, support will diminish for public education. Will it be easy? Absolutely not! But as John Quincy Adams said: "Courage and perseverance have a magical talisman, before which difficulties disappear and obstacles vanish into air."

Part III--What is a "virtual" high school?

To put it in simple terms, a "virtual" high school (VHS) does not have any walls or barriers of time or tradition; instead, it exists on-line and can be accessed any time of day or night 365 days of the year. It certainly is dramatically different from the brick and mortar high school buildings used 180 days and less than a third of each day, and it can be "built" in a fraction of the time and at a fraction of the cost. Furthermore, accessibility to a VHS is absolutely vital in helping a traditional high school to being

transforming itself into a 21st century (millennium) school at warp speeds. In fact, in England the technology for "virtual" teachers has been developed.

Does this sound like the "twilight zone?" To many, it will be seen as a Star Trek trip to another planet. However, the reality is that "virtual" high schools exist on this planet and in the U.S. Let's take a look.

The Florida On-Line High School (FHS) began in 1997 with the support of the Florida Department of Education. It has a very interesting motto: "Any time, any place, any path, any pace." Its mission is "to take full advantage of current instructional technology and rapidly expanding resources of the Informational Age to provide comprehensive educational programs which will enable students to be productive, lifelong learners." Any Florida student in grades 9-12 can access the offerings and over 3600 students currently take one or more courses and all teachers are state certified.

It is a ideal solution for students who have scheduling conflicts at their high school, are home because of illness, work or have other responsibilities, need to make up credits, want to accelerate their academic program, or desire to take courses not offered at their own school.

What are the benefits of FHS for traditional high schools? High schools can expand offerings and provide remedial opportunities at no cost (no rooms are needed and no teachers need to be hired), as well as, provide very flexible scheduling. In addition, courses with small enrollments can be eliminated (at a savings); yet, still be made available on-line to students.

The only commitment a school makes is to appoint a FHS contact counselor who receives and reports progress reports and final grades. The counselor also handles problems or questions.

Students are required to complete assignments and keep in communication with the teacher; and FHS courses all have a variety of assessments including a supervised final comprehensive examination.

An independent evaluation report concluded that "the curriculum at FHS has met or exceeded standards we expect but don't always demand of the traditional classroom."

Of course, "virtual" learning does not work for all students. For example, students who have a history of high absenteeism are usually not successful.

Another extremely interesting school is the Maryland Virtual High School (MVHS) founded in 1994. What is unique is that it's like a magnet school because it specializes only in science and mathematics. Isn't this a simple and inexpensive way to solve the critical shortage of math and science teachers? Instead of every district trying to hire such teachers, MVHS allows all districts to share the courses and teachers.

Imagine a school offering Aquaculture Science, Architecture, Aviation, DNA Technology, etc.? These are among 200 course offerings available at a VHS located in Hudson, Mass. The difference with this on-line school is that school districts must pay a fee for students to access the courses; but it's far less expensive than adding classrooms and hiring teachers.

There is no end to the solutions that virtual high schools can provide. In California, a Cyber (virtual) High School was established to meet the needs of migrant students and other students who need more education and access to technology. Cyber High "brings to the poor and disadvantaged what other schools already have big time." This virtual school has its roots in PASS (Portable Assisted Study Sequence)--a 22-

year-old program aimed at helping migrant teens finish high school despite frequent moves. There is no deadline to complete a course which allows students to progress at their own pace.

One of the problems in urban schools is that there is a high percentage of students who "migrant" from one school to another or one district to another in a school year. Wouldn't a program similar to PASS and Cyber High accommodate the needs of these students?

What is important to understand about the virtual school is that "you just can't compare a black-and-white paper system with virtual video and multimedia…it's so much more stimulating and dynamic." Shouldn't the best teaching presentations be made available to all students?

But the most important impact of the VHS is that it can level the educational playing field for all students more quickly and at far less cost. What is also neat is that a VHS never has outdated textbooks, overcrowded classes, or wasted seat time.

There are certainly many tech skeptics and one was William J. Bennett, former U.S. Secretary of Education. He has obviously changed his mind because he is now chairman of an online K-12 venture. It has already received its first contract to operate a virtual charter school in Pennsylvania. Sometimes, smart people do learn.

What does the Connecticut Virtual High School offer? Nothing! It doesn't exist! However, Connecticut does have a Distance Learning Consortium for college courses. Wouldn't it make sense for the regional service centers to combine resources and start a virtual high school for the state? Aren't they in the business of providing services that local schools cannot provide or find too expensive? Of course, the Florida model can be followed by having the State Department of Education fund a virtual high school.

What virtual high schools demonstrate is that many problems facing education today can be solved more quickly with technology and at far less cost. Instead, educators and policy-makers wring their hands in frustration because the problems they face seem. What appears to be insurmountable is trying to melt the iceberg of the outmoded and traditional approaches being used to solve educational problems rather than modern, available, and demonstrated technology.

TOPIC 16

Is math instruction miscalculated madness?

Part one of a two-part series

On the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), U. S. seniors scored 19 out of 21 nations in the math section of the test (physics was dead last) surpassing only Cyprus and South Africa. These results are consistent with prior TIMSS exams. It is important to note that Asian countries did not participate; if they did, the results would have been worse.

Clearly, there is a crisis in school mathematics and it is nothing new. Why do U.S. students continue to perform so shamefully low and so consistently when compared with other industrialized nations and even with prior generations of students? According to the American Policy Center, "math classes simply ignore math and talk about something else."

Why is this happening? It is the same reason for the persistent reading wars--serious philosophical differences. However, unlike reading, mathematics is an absolute science; obviously, even this fact doesn't seem to make any difference.

The story begins with the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) that developed three reports dealing with math teaching methods and standards the first of which was developed in 1987. According to Frank B. Allen, former President of NCTM, "…they have urged the application of highly controversial methods of teaching before researchers have verified them by well-controlled and replicated research studies…and our entire school system has become a laboratory for testing of untried methods." In essence, NCTM removed arithmetic from mathematics. Yep, it sounds rather dumb, but that's what it did.

Allen blames the early use of calculators that have replaced memorization used for centuries to learn number facts and fundamental operations of arithmetic. For example, under "New-New Math" programs children are not taught to memorize multiplication tables. Why? Because the advocates believe memorization is "bad." The result is that any real problem solving is performed on a calculator rather than through mental exercise. It's interesting to note that the highest scoring countries do not allow the early use of calculators.

Furthermore, "New-New Math" emphasizes that students need only understand and remember those concepts that they discover for themselves rather than obtaining knowledge and skills from direct instruction. In other words, students will arrive at the correct answers if they "think about it long enough." That certainly would be an interesting way to build a bridge.

In fairness to NCTM, it has wavered somewhat from its earlier standards and announced last year that "arithmetic be put back into mathematics, urging teachers to emphasize the fundamentals of computation rather than focus on concepts and reasoning."

Adding to the continuing math meltdown are grading systems that minimize the importance of correct answers by using subjective and inaccurate grading techniques such as students grading themselves. The meltdown is further aided by social engineering that has crept into the math curriculum to build self-esteem and inculcate issues of social awareness.

For example, an eighth grade math textbook repeatedly uses blocks of text under the heading of "Save Planet Earth." One section describes the benefits of recycling aluminum cans. It goes on to ask students to list the threats to endangered species; and it even has a section on multiculturalism. This information may be great for the environment and social engineering, but it has nothing to do with learning math skills.

The Interactive Mathematics Program, billed as a college prep course, is integrated with English grammar, environmental issues, HIV/AIDS instruction, social studies, science and geography and has no math standards. In fact, only one-fourth of the normal math content is covered. Yet, this program is among the five listed as exemplary by Dandy Daddy (U.S. Office of Education). It would seem that the program was evaluated to determine whether it met the standards of political correctness rather than mathematical standards. Is it any wonder that miscalculated math madness exists?

Fortunately, this "madness" has not gone unnoticed. Over 200 math and science scholars from leading universities (including Caltech, Stanford, and Yale and seven Nobel laureates, wrote to Dandy Daddy requesting that the endorsements of the recommended programs be rescinded. The results? None! After all, what do math and science scholars know about mathematics.

But the madness knows no bounds. In Kansas, the newest fad introduces dance as a method of math instruction. For example, a high school class tried to memorize the quadratic formula by re-creating it with their bodies; and elementary children "count rhythms, form lines, and twist their bodies into angles and shapes." Very creative to be sure, but is this the most effective way to teach math?

What are some other results of this mutilated math? On a statewide assessment in Massachusetts, two-thirds of fourth graders could not multiply 256 times 98. At the University of Michigan, top math students who were admitted from a top school that used "new-new-math" ended up in remedial courses. At Penn State University, students in introductory economics didn't know the difference between a numerator and a denominator.

In 1997 only 3,826 bachelor degrees were awarded in physics, the lowest number in forty years; and half the students entering graduate studies in 1998 were foreign born. In other words, our technological prowess is largely the result of immigrants rather than native-born American students. Again, let's not have the facts influence politically correct clutter

Just as the reading debacle caused California to dump whole-language instruction, it has also led in dumping the NCTM standards because of poor math results. Over half of all students attending the California State University System (which admits only the top third of high school graduates) have been required to take remedial math--up from 23% in 1989. In Palo Alto, math scores dropped from 86th to the 58th percentile, and fully 63% of middle school parents paid outside tutors to get real math help.

As a result, California developed new math standards. A review of their standards by the Fordham Foundation found that they surpass even the equivalent documents used in Japan.

Perhaps Bertrand Russell was right when he said: "Mathematics may be defined as the subject in which we never know what we are talking about."

Is there a solution to reform math instruction?

Part two of a two part series

There have been many attempts to reform mathematics instruction; unfortunately, they have been permeated with a deeply flawed process because too many "reformed" math efforts ignore math and present "fuzzy-muzzy" math instead. Certainly one reason is a Public Agenda study that found "only 7 percent of education professors think teachers should be conveyors of knowledge, 92 percent believe teachers should just enable students to learn on their own."

Also, the reforms advocated by the National Council of teachers of Mathematics are not reforms. According to Dr. Bill Quirk, a former professor of mathematics who lives in Guilford, "NCTM doesn't want to reform math education, they want to replace K-12 math with calculators, math appreciation, and a whole range of general content-independent process skills…and emphasize social goals and psychological considerations, not traditional math content."

Why hasn't there been any public revulsion and revolt about how mathematics has been so badly miscalculated and mismanaged? Parents and the public have been kept in the dark about these issues because the dumbing-down of math instruction is buried within the education and research cocoons and ignored by the media. However, this does not mean that there haven't been attempts to try and correct the rampant mutilation of mathematics.

The National Commission on Mathematics and Science: Teaching for the 21st Century was created in 1999 to "investigate and report on the quality of mathematics and science teaching in the nation." The report, Before It's Too Late, was completed in September 2000. It begins with what is and has been known for years as fact: "The current preparation that students in the United States receive in mathematics and science is, in a word, unacceptable." So what's new?

The report goes on to state, "America's students must improve their performance in mathematics and science if they are to succeed in today's world and if the United States is to stay competitive in an integrated global economy." It certainly is the right rhetoric, but how will this rhetoric be translated to real math reform?

The solution recommended by the report is that "the most direct route to improving mathematics achievement for all students is better teaching." Well, isn't this a startling and enlightening revelation? It took a 25-member commission a year and a half to arrive at this conclusion when many scholars and educators have trumpeted this solution repeatedly for years. Oh well, this report makes it official.

What does the report recommend to solve this problem? It begins with an investment of five billion dollars. Money is always the answer; unfortunately, it doesn't solve the problem of philosophical differences. The report goes on to recommend three specific steps.

The first is to establish an ongoing system to improve the quality of math teaching. This recommendation by the Commission was the result of its finding that: "Despite the dramatic transformations throughout our society over the last half-century, teaching methods in mathematics classes have remained virtually unchanged." Really? Isn't the problem that "New-New Math" and dumbing-down methods and content have, in fact, been a dramatic change? These changes, rather than improving mathematics instruction and content, have proven a serious miscalculation. Although there have been other efforts to improve the "quality" of math teaching there has been no agreement among the "educrats" on what is "quality."

The second step is to increase significantly the number of math teachers and improve the quality of their preparation. This would be accomplished in part by creating 15 competitively selected Math and Science Teaching Academies to annually train 3,000 Academy Fellows. Sounds great, except hasn't anyone told the Commission that there is a shortage of math and science majors interested in teaching? Education cannot compete with private industry to attract math majors so creating academies will do little if anything because it changes nothing. And to make matters worse, certification requirements keep getting more onerous. Having a math major, even with straight A's and a Ph.D., does not qualify for certification.

The third step is to improve the working environment and make the teaching profession more attractive for K-12 math teachers. Improving the working environment has been touted for years as one way to attract and retain teachers--again, nothing new. In fact, just try to find a school system that has a written and detailed policy designed to retain teachers. The reality is that there are incentives for early retirement (subtraction), not retention (addition).

Sorry, but it's doubtful if such glossy educational gibberish will solve the problem. It's interesting that no mention was made to use technology to solve the shortage of math teachers—using master math teachers to deliver instruction through distance learning. Nor was any mention made that teachers need to be employed 12 months of the year to do what is needed and to make it a profession. And most importantly, math teachers cannot be made an elite within the teaching profession without creating a host of other problems.

If more math teachers are to be developed, it must begin in the K-12 grades. And there is a very harsh reality that needs to be faced which is that mathematics does not have priority in schools—a fact not mentioned in the report. Establishing such a priority is really the first step that should have been recommended. Once a district makes it a priority, the other steps should then follow more logically.

One good part of the report does recommend that a complete needs assessment must be conducted by every school district to determine the quality of staff, instruction, materials, course offerings and, very important, professional development. Isn't this what schools should be doing on a regular basis? However, here again, any such effort must begin with the development of math quality indicators and standards before--not after--such an assessment is conducted. The report also does not mention the fact that schools are simply not into total quality management--and never have been—because it's too painful.

The report concludes with "the time to plant the tree is now—before it is too late." Wise words to be sure, but the "right" tree must be planted in the "right" way and nourished with the "right" nutrients. With all the educational reforms over the past 40 years, it hasn't happened because politics, pandering, and political correctness pollute the plantings.

Too bad there are no "educational environmentalists" to control the pollutants.

Are high school exit exams elusive?

Compromise legislation (SB 1175) requiring Connecticut local school boards to establish basic skill standards (for high school graduation) by 2003 passed the legislature's Education Committee. Advocates of this "exit exam" requirement called it a "huge victory." Are they in for a rude awakening!

To begin with, the bill does not require a date for local school districts to put the standards into effect; worse yet, it gives local school districts the power to implement the standards as they choose. In other words, there could be as many different standards and implementation dates as there are districts. Interestingly, the bill does not provide any consequences for failure.

However, the bill does state that assessing a student's level of competency should include the use of the tenth grade mastery exam. Does this mean that only tenth grade skills are needed? By the way, tenth grade skills, according to what is happening in other states, really means 8th grade level skills.

The purpose of exit exams is to raise standards and increase school accountability--a worthwhile and commendable goal. Currently 28 states require or have approved such tests for high school graduation. The question is whether exit exams do what they purport to do or if they are simply elusive--fraudulent and deceitful—in practice. So let's take a take a look at what is happening nationally.

A trial administration of California's exit exam proved shocking. If students were required to answer 70% of the test questions correctly in order to pass, 85% would fail the math and 70% would fail English. Since such a high rate of failure cannot be tolerated, standards are being lowered and the minimum score needed to pass will be postponed until 2004. In other words, don't remediate, simply require less.

In Massachusetts, hundreds of students boycotted the tests and the state's teachers launched an advertising campaign calling the tests "flawed and unfair." In Ohio, parents and teachers started a petition drive against that state's tests. In Virginia, parents and teachers pressured the state into softening the standards needed to pass because few students could meet them. And fear of large-scale failure led state officials in Wisconsin and Arizona to rescind or postpone the test requirement for graduation.

In Texas, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund instituted a federal lawsuit claiming the test unfair to minorities because eighty percent of those who flunked the last-chance administration (students have 8 chances to pass) were minorities. A no-pass means no diploma.

MALDEF's challenge was that school systems failed minority students because of inferior curriculum and second-rate teachers. However, they had a most ridiculous argument: "We don't think it (the test) accurately reflected what minorities know." In fact, the test results indicated exactly what they knew in terms of the academic standards and that's the problem. How can MALDEF claim the school systems failed to properly teach minorities on one hand, and then say the tests didn't measure what they know?

Most startling, however, was how New York State defended itself in a recent court case charging that students were shortchanged in New York City. The state defended itself by arguing that all it had to provide was an eighth-grade education because that was what was needed to pass the Regents Competency Tests. The arrogance of such a defense is beyond comprehension.

Of course, politicians take full advantage of such controversy. A bill in Congress would allow students to receive diplomas even if they can't pass an exit exam.

Adding "fuel to the fire" is the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights. OCR claims that exit exams violate civil rights because they discriminate against minorities; as a result, it has become involved in testing disputes in Texas, Ohio, Nevada and North Carolina. What OCR is attempting to do is ensure that any system of accountability is nondiscriminatory. That's fine, except, any accountability system will flunk their definition: "…standards cannot deny opportunities or benefits to students based on their race, national origin (including limited English proficiency), sex or disability."

The problem created by the use of exit exams is that the curriculum and standards don't catch up quickly enough with the exam requirements. It takes time to bring curriculum in line with new standards, train teachers, make the needed changes in instruction and, most important, provide the resources and "backbone" to make it all happen. For example, an analysis of the trial results in California found that one-fourth of the students did not receive instruction that would allow them to give correct answers. Therefore, how can students be held accountable for not knowing what they haven't been taught?

Another important issue is that although polls show parents are overwhelmingly in favor of standards, they don't want them to really mean anything.

The paramount concern in mandating exit exams is to ensure adherence to legal requirements. In this regard, there are three key factors: (1) All students must be included; however, accommodations must be provided for special needs students (2) The test questions must only cover material students have been taught and (3) There must be enough lead time. Courts have found that anything less than 4-6 years for implementation will be on shaky legal ground.

The real question concerning exit exams is whether or not they do, in fact, measure meaningful standards. As an example, Michael Kirst, a professor of education at Stanford and a member of the board that determined that the California exit exam should be given in 10th grade, said the panel was told to set the test for seventh and eighth grade standards.

Based on what has happened and is happening in other states, Connecticut's attempt to legislate district exit exams will certainly be challenged. Can you imagine the chaos that will result for some districts from civil rights and other legal challenges? However, it will be a financial boondoggle for lawyers!

But there is another critical issue that needs to be considered. The results of the 2000 National Assessment of Educational Progress test showed that two-thirds of the fourth-graders tested nationally can't read proficiently and this continues an eight-year trend. In addition, the gap in math and reading scores grew between the best and worst performing students. Clearly, the standards movement has not produced the results intended; and, exit exams with Mickey Mouse standards won't help.

However, the reality is that politicians and educrats will prefer a Disney World approach to an exit exam so that the vast majority of students will pass rather than one that genuinely assesses how well students are really doing according to world class standards—not local or state standards. Admittedly and sadly, to do otherwise would be political suicide.

What is absolutely clear is that in spite of the harsh rhetoric that exit exams demand too much, the fact is that they don't really demand much of anything. Will Connecticut learn from this history or add to the exit exam turmoil and chaos now taking place across the land?

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This book has three goals:

1. To identify the internal systemic forces and the external societal forces impacting education; and within each, to discuss the cycle of success, excess, distress, and redress.

2. To help those who are sincerely interested in retaining and improving the public school system--the vast majority of the population--understand and appreciate that the forces impacting education are not isolated from one another, but rather intertwined in their relationships with each other.

3. To provide a rationale basis for assessing the forces and the negative impact they have had and are continuing to have in preventing and thwarting rather than supporting and sustaining school improvement efforts.