

SCAN



CRAZY AS A PEACOCK

G.P.S. Reddy, a 54-
year-old retired
psychiatrist, has
concocted the ulti-

mate self-esteem project: He's build-
ing a vast array of mirrors for 400
peacocks so he can watch them
preen. The knowledge gained, he as-
sures us, will help humans gain
insights into boosting their self-
esteem. (If, however, you tend to
agree with Ambrose Bierce that self-
esteem is best defined as "an erro-
neous appraisal," read the series of
articles beginning on page 46.)

COMMON SENSE ON SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

Americans rank violence and disorder in schools as their top educational concern. Most of them believe parents are at the root of the problem, and parents agree. But an even greater majority believe that education and other officials are not doing enough about the problem in schools. They are right. There are severe limits on what we can do to shape up home life, but we can do a great deal more to shape up school discipline. Some bad policies hobble schools from dealing effectively with the problem, and a change in policies can turn that around.

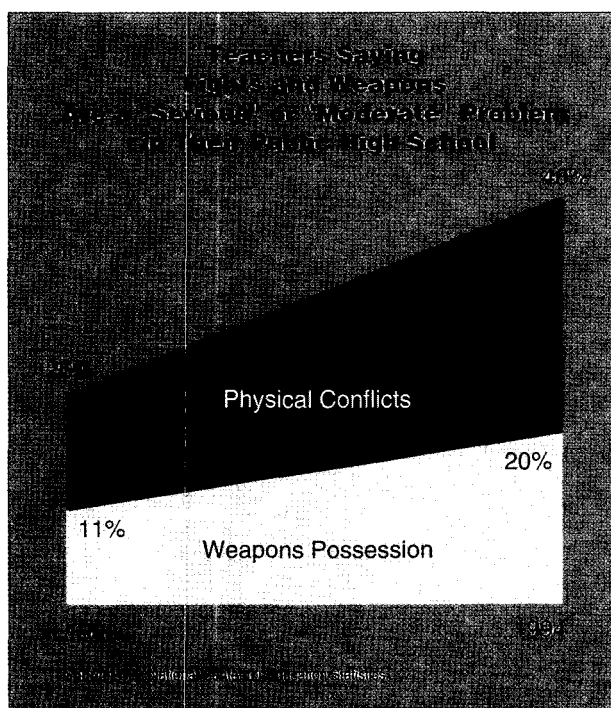
Americans are united and clear about what to do. Large majorities of the public, parents, and teachers want students who are caught with drugs or with weapons to

be removed permanently from their schools. They also agree that chronically disruptive students should be taken out of class so that teachers can concentrate on the kids who want to learn. They understand what many education reformers and politicians seem not to: No matter how high the standards we set, no matter how good the curriculum, the teaching and the materials, if we allow one or two chronically disruptive students to stay in class and ruin the opportunity for other students to learn, we can forget about achieving world-class standards.

We can also forget about teaching youngsters important lessons about responsibility and justice. We hear often from parents and teachers about administrators who not only fail to punish disruptive kids but buy them off with privileges, all the way from sweets and music in time-out rooms, to getting out of assignments, to ordering teachers to ease up on the behavioral and other standards they hold those students to. It's a perverse lesson for students: Doing bad does you no harm or gets you the goods, while doing good gets you nothing.

Liberals and conservatives share the blame for poor policies on school discipline or indifferent enforcement. Many liberals are now so preoccupied with the relative handful of students who are violent or chronically disruptive that

regular students aren't on their radar screens. Troubled kids are not responsible for their actions, we hear; they are victims of society's injustice, and if we don't keep them in regular classes and schools, we are denying their right to an education and harming their self-esteem. On the other hand, many conservatives are now so intent on turning the public into private school voucher supporters that they push the idea that public school is synonymous with chaos. So instead of backing measures to get the two to five percent of students who are violent or chronically disruptive out of regular public schools, they argue that the only hope for the students who do the right things—the vast majority—is to give them the public dollars to go to private schools! (Needless to say, proposals to give violent and chronically disruptive students a



voucher for a second chance at a private school have been met with stony silence.)

By now, the double-talk and tiptoeing around school discipline have produced a lot of moral disgust and political disaffection. Overcoming that won't be easy, but here are some reforms that would work:

- Replace fuzzy discipline codes that require an army of lawyers to interpret with clear and rigorous ones, strictly enforced and the same way for all.
- Have state legislatures require school districts to establish and enforce these codes, with penalties for failing to do so. Also, require full reporting of code violations.
- Create more alternative schools for chronically disruptive students. Good ones are expensive, but not nearly as costly as the loss of learning disruptive kids cause their classmates. They are also far cheaper than prison, where violent youngsters are headed if they don't get help.
- Revise current legal procedures so they are less time-consuming and expensive. Moreover, have judges hear not only from a disruptive student brought up on charges but also from the students, or their parents, whose classrooms have been made hellish by that student. We should also consider school-based ways of handling discipline disputes. Arbitration, for example, is a relatively quick and inexpensive way of settling disputes, and decisions generally hold up in court.

Like many educational issues, the school discipline debate reflects Americans' larger concerns about rights and responsibilities, values, and fairness. Straight talk and common sense about school discipline from politicians, school officials, and education reformers could be a first step to overcoming this nation's political cynicism and crisis of authority.

—*Albert Shanker is president of the American Federation of Teachers.*

SAVING KIDS FOR PROFIT

Youth Services International, a for-profit publicly traded company, has recently opened a reform school for kids in trouble

with the law on an old college campus in Tarkio, Missouri (pop. 2,200). Currently over 250 students are enrolled in the school, the brainchild of Jim Hindman, a Maryland businessman who founded the Jiffy Lube franchise. YSI now runs 13 facilities across the country for troubled youths, and the demand for what the schools offer is strong.

The company attempts to rehabilitate by a program of "positive peer culture" that focuses on work, education, and athletics. The kids are rewarded for good behavior by membership in a "Generals club" that focuses gang-like social pressure on positive undertakings like learning and hard work. The program has not been operating long, but the early results from the first YSI facilities are encouraging. Nationwide, less than a third of all juvenile offenders stay out of trouble after leaving public detention centers. But according to Rob Dowis, an official with YSI, a non-scientific survey of kids leaving their Clarinda, Iowa facility shows that around half of the graduates have avoided further trouble with the law.

YSI's Tarkio Academy contracts with several state agencies here in Missouri and also has contracts with juvenile authorities in other states. The company provides dramatic economic advantages over traditional state-run homes for delinquents. YSI is presently charging the state of Missouri some \$70 a day per student, with higher rates for handicapped students. Meanwhile the average cost of state-run facilities for juvenile offenders is around \$120 a day. The Tarkio facility has recently been licensed for more students and someday hopes to have 325 students. The school is nearing the break-even point, and Mr. Hindman has seemingly found a business with almost unlimited demand.

Part of YSI's strategy for rehabilitation is to make its mostly inner-city students feel a part of our rural com-

munity. That strategy seems to be working. Recently, a talent show was held in town. Acts included a quite passable rendition of Bette Midler's "The Rose," a couple of farmers singing a medley of country music songs, and a tumbler. There was a quartet of extremely large Southern Baptist men singing "Amazing Grace," followed immediately by a group from YSI doing a rap song called "Whoop, There It Is." The audience was visibly moved by a skit put on by YSI kids that involved a drug deal gone bad and a shooting. The skit ended with the main character straightening out his life at the YSI campus in Tarkio. The evening closed with the local Boy Scouts doing a pantomime about bubble gum.

The chasm between "Amazing Grace" and "Whoop, There It Is" is huge, although more a generational one than a cultural or racial one, if audience participation is any clue. The distance between the Boy Scouts and the Crips and Bloods is even larger.

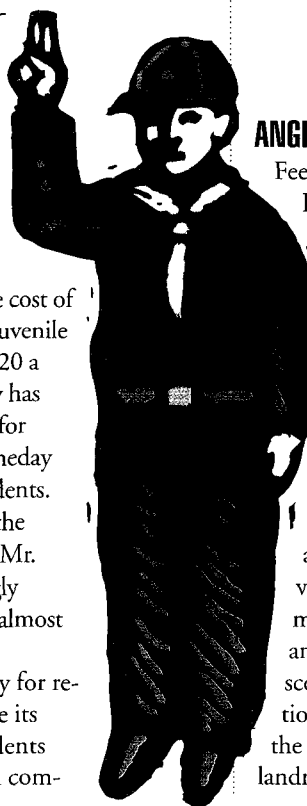
Yet thanks to the efforts of a visionary named Jim Hindman, some young people in trouble are going to have their lives turned around by a program of work and small town values. And at a price we can afford.

—*Blake Hurst farms in Tarkio and contributes regularly to The American Enterprise.*

ANGRY WHITE FEMALES

Feeling sorry for the angry white male? Perhaps it's the angry white female for whom we should feel sorry in this year's two most controversial admission battles in education.

In March, Cheryl Hopwood led three white men to New Orleans' Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals to contest their rejection by the University of Texas Law School. Hopwood—white, married, raising a disabled child, and for the first time able to afford college—was not "diverse" enough for the university administration that preferred 92 black and Hispanic students with lower test scores. The "Texan four" became a national phenomenon when they exposed the university's racial quotas and won a landmark victory in Hopwood's name.





"The use of race in and of itself, to choose students," the court ruled, "is no more rational on its own terms than would be choices based upon the physical size or blood type of applicants."

Enter "angry white female" number two. Thirteen-year-old Julia McLaughlin from Boston, Massachusetts, is fighting reverse discrimination from the school that taught five signers of the Declaration of Independence. Boston Latin, a selective school since 1635, determines admission by entrance exam. But a 1970s court ruling by Judge Arthur Garrity requires Boston to enforce a 35 percent black and Hispanic quota at the school. Although she outscored over 100 accepted applicants, Julia was rejected. Her father and lawyer, Michael McLaughlin, is suing Boston's School Committee.

McLaughlin believes that white females at the school suffer discrimination not merely on grounds of race, but also gender. "Fifteen years ago the four sections of the exam—verbal, reading, math, and quantitative—were weighted evenly," he complains. "But when girls began to outperform boys in the verbal and reading, the math and quantitative sections were given four times their original weighting." Boston School Committee lawyers admit the changes but deny any political motives.

In the end, Julia's case is not just about an angry white female. It is about Asian students who are classified as white in the quota system and whose numbers would double without quotas. It is about roughly 40 percent of minority students at the school failing to graduate. And it is about the outrage both Julia and her father feel towards the Boston law firm Lane and Altman, which fired McLaughlin for taking on his daughter's case. McLaughlin blames his dismissal on Henry Owens, former head of Boston's NAACP, who joined the firm just after the suit was filed.

Ironically, the same Judge Garrity who introduced Boston's quota and desegregation policies two decades ago now says recent U.S. Supreme Court rulings requiring racial quotas to be "narrowly tailored" and based on "compelling government interests" mean that McLaughlin will probably succeed.

Maybe "angry white females" will not be angry for too much longer.

—*Sarah Stock works at the Washington bureaus of The Australian and The Times of London.*

IS CHOICE ONLY FOR CHELSEA?

Education Secretary Richard Riley sparred with former Education Secretary Bill Bennett on a recent "News Hour with Jim Lehrer":

LEHRER: Secretary Riley, would you agree with Senator Dole that President Clinton's administration has done everything it can to kill school choice movements in this country?

RILEY: Well, of course, President Clinton is strong for choice within the public system—charter schools, public school choice, magnet schools, all of those things, within the public school system. He absolutely is opposed to transferring public tax dollars to private schools through a voucher program. I think that's a mistake. I think it's wrong. It's harmful to public education. And I think it's harmful to private and parochial schools, it makes them less private and less parochial.

LEHRER: Now, Secretary Bennett, you support that voucher system, do you not, that Senator Dole does?

BENNETT: Absolutely. And I believe it is unconscionable for the Clinton administration to be opposed to it. These are public tax dollars, and children who go to Catholic schools or Baptist schools or Lutheran schools are every bit as much of the public as children who go to state-supported or government schools. We have choice in the American system of higher education. If you get a Pell Grant or a guaranteed student loan, you can go to Yeshiva, you can go to Notre Dame, you can go to Liberty Baptist—you'll be theologically very confused if you go to all three, but you can go.... Constitutionally, you can do it. The difficulty...with the Clinton administration's position is that it acknowledges that there are differences, dramatic differences in schools around the country, but it fails to give opportunity to children who do not have the means to get out of a bad school and go to a good school.

RILEY: Well, I think Bill well knows that state constitutions generally require free public education provided by the state. That's K through 12. That doesn't extend to higher education. So we fully recognize the state's responsibility, the local function, to provide free public education for all children in the state. Now when you get over into higher education, that's a whole different deal. There's no state requirement for that. So on a higher educational level, every student is on their own. We handle all those programs totally differently, but we respect the state and local control and responsibility for K through 12.

I GOTTA BE ME

Northern Virginia public schools are reputedly some of the best in the country. Imagine the surprise, then, when one AEI scholar's child came home with the lyrics to the rap song "Identity" the fifth and sixth grades had sung that day. Rising from self-esteem to self-worship, its chorus exults,

Identity is the world of me.

My own identity is reserved for me.

a fact, you see



BENNETT: States can very well provide for this free education by providing an opportunity for parents, through scholarships, to let parents get the money directly and choose whatever school they want. Again, the difficulty here is that the Clintons come to Washington, D.C., they are given the choice of any public school in Washington, D.C.—public school choice, which we've just heard lauded—but not one school, public school in Washington, D.C., was good enough for their daughter. That was their judgment, so they enrolled her in a private school, but that same choice is denied to the thousands, hundreds of thousands of parents in Washington, D.C.

RILEY: Well, of course, when the Clintons were in Arkansas, Chelsea went to the public school and got along and loved it. When she came here, it's a whole different deal with the President of the United States and their daughter. They've got a perfect right and an obligation to send her where they think that they ought to send her. The President's daughter is totally different from all other children.

BENNETT: Most people think their daughters are pretty special...I understand the security considerations, but these have been dealt with before with other Presidents' children. The question is...Do we get real educational opportunity in this country or not? Do we say to the children of Washington, D.C., and their parents, "You just go to these schools whether they're good or bad. We have the money, we will send our children where we want them to go?"

PUBLIC SCHOOL SUCCESS

The Chattanooga School for Arts and Sciences makes a powerful argument that old-fashioned, rigorous education works. How many other public schools can boast of a 100 percent graduation rate, with about 95 percent of graduates going on to four-year colleges?

The Tennessee school teaches all grades, K-12, following the approach of the Paideia educational reform movement. Principally the idea of scholar and education reformer Mortimer Adler, this student-centered method uses a three-column method of instruction, coaching,

and seminars, emphasizing student responsibility, not the pontification of dumbed-down textbooks or long lectures by teachers. In lieu of textbooks, students study only classic original texts.

In addition, Paideia schools have a rigorous curriculum. To graduate, Chattanooga students must take a foreign language every year (including elementary school); master math and science requirements that include algebra 1 and 2, geometry, biology, chemistry, and physics; and complete 100 hours of community service.

The school also emphasizes parental involvement—parents must assist the school 18 hours each year doing anything from coordinating athletic events to standing in for a teacher if a student must be tutored.

The results—better standardized test scores and fewer behavior problems—speak for themselves. The school's accomplishments, by the way, are achieved using the same amount of money and resources the city's other public schools have. "We just do a better job with it," explains one staffer. She adds that the Paideia program's secret is to take kids of different races, incomes, and backgrounds, show them how they can succeed, and then watch them do just that.

—JD

LEARNING BY HEART

Amid the multitudinous recommendations for the reform of teaching and learning, one crucial element has been overlooked: learning by heart. This phrase is so familiar to us that we rarely notice its literal sense. Learning some things by heart means more than performing a merely cerebral exercise. It also signifies a kind of learning that touches and changes us in incalculable ways, going to the very core of what makes us human beings.

Memory is connected to character. We sense that people who remember significant details about us, or who never forget anniversaries of special occasions, are somehow rooted in the reality of life and,

at the same time, resistant to the passage of mere events. Memory is our sole link between past, present, and future. The careful attention to detail developed in learning by heart prepares us for many things, but especially for the ultimate human test of preserving something from the flux of time.

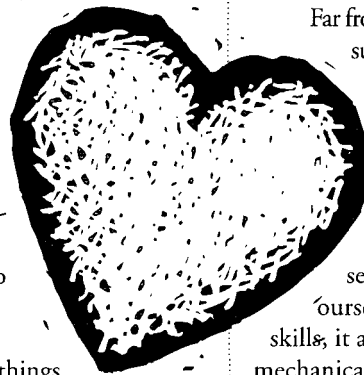
By contrast, almost all current education emphasizes the imparting of "skills." There is nothing wrong with learning skills per se, but the change of emphasis suggests nervousness about teaching anything that might actually shape character. If you memorize one of the great human texts like the Gettysburg Address or something out of Yeats, you may no longer actually believe the kind of rhetoric that newspapers, politicians, television, and educational experts purvey.

Just think of the end of Yeats' "A Prayer for my Daughter":

*And may her bridegroom bring her to a
house
Where all's accustomed, ceremonious,
For arrogance and hatred are the wares
Peddled in the thoroughfares.
How but in custom and in ceremony
Are innocence and beauty born?
Ceremony's a name for the rich horn,
And custom for the spreading laurel tree.*

Far from politically correct, to have such lines in our memory and to meditate on them inoculates us against any amount of contemporary nonsense.

Better, then, for the educators to stick to skills. Skills are easy to sell and seem practical. When we see ourselves as merely acquiring skills, it assuages our great fear of mere mechanical repetition. (Besides, teaching things by heart is hard.) Admittedly, the mere accumulation of facts, or vocabulary, or lines of poetry, or the times table, without the skills to make use of them would be a sterile pursuit. But almost the entire educational establishment has fallen prey to the notion that skills are adaptable to the changing circumstances students will face in the modern world, while facts are inert or, even worse, soon out of date.



This is almost the exact opposite of the truth. To begin with, without historical, scientific, numerical, and other points of reference, what are skills supposed to work with? It is not enough to say that students will learn to acquire the facts they need as they go along, when they have never learned to acquire anything in the first place. Imagine a pianist who was supposed to learn musical "skills," but never learned any actual scales or arpeggios. Scales are only the rudiments of musical understanding and performance, but you will not become Haydn or Stravinsky, Duke Ellington or Ella Fitzgerald, without having those by heart—and the earlier the better.

To know math by heart, songs by heart, even state capitals and the principal exports of South American countries by heart, brings us into direct touch with the poetry of the world. For that matter, knowing poetry by heart often shapes what the heart is all about. It is just when some remembered verbal formula rises into consciousness unbidden and we see ourselves as connected to great minds in different ages and places that we experience one of the greatest joys of human solidarity: we know that things change and we die, but we can still speak to each other over vast distances and obstacles.

Consider the alternative: a nation of skills, technical abilities rooted nowhere, standing nowhere, going nowhere. Emotions driven by immediate impulses without the guidance of traditions, great minds, or noble words.

My wife visited Ukraine a few years ago and found people who had kept their culture and sanity alive by meeting in parks at night to sing the old national songs disapproved of by the totalitarians. They were still doing it after they had regained political freedom. Learning by heart indeed.

—Robert Royal is vice president of the Ethics and Public Policy Center.

EDUCATION'S FOUR-LETTER WORD

Lord is the only four-letter word that makes liberals blush.

That's particularly true in education—both at the high school and university levels. The same students who are presumed old enough for explicit safe sex lessons, as

well as condoms in every classroom or dorm room, are considered too immature and impressionable to hear someone mention God.

Thou shalt not say the Lord's name in any vein seems to be the prevailing ethos at high schools and colleges all across the country. Just ask Paul Saito. Selected as student speaker for the May commencement ceremonies of Pennsylvania State University's College of Business Administration, Saito planned to give thanks to God in his speech. But a committee of students and university staff told him there was no way in hell he could do so. All references to religion were forbidden. Some folks, presumably, might be offended.

Somehow one suspects that if Saito had wished to rail against white males he would not have been told that that was inappropriate. Or if he had wanted to give thanks to New Age gurus who helped him hold imaginary conversations with Eleanor Roosevelt's professors, that too wouldn't have ruffled any feathers. But God was off-limits. So Saito, a graduating senior, decided to ditch the speech altogether.

And what exactly did Saito wish to say that was so threatening, so pernicious, that it was simply beyond the pale for a college graduation ceremony? "I thank God for who He is, what He does, and how He has provided me strength and guidance in my life."

That's it. There was no sectarian religious talk. No theology. Not even a quote from scriptures. Just a simple thanks to God in the course of Saito thanking his parents and various members of the Penn State community in an otherwise unremarkable graduation speech.

Business College Dean J.D. Hammond has since called the decision to censor the speech "probably" a mistake. Probably? And Penn State University presi-

dent Graham Spanier has said it won't happen again.

Certainly, these two might have been a bit more active in ensuring that Saito was allowed to speak. But, uh, God-willing, the next time a speaker wishes to mention God, he'll get the OK—even if it does leave a few professors red-faced.

—Evan Gabr is a columnist for the New York Post.

THEY CAN'T WRITE!

Students today can't write. No, I don't mean they can't string words together into sentences and string sentences together into paragraphs. That's old news.

I mean they can't *write*. I mean cursive, handwriting, penmanship—that little skill kids used to learn in the second and third grades, as soon as their motor skills developed. Never mind the art of effectively moving a significant thought from one head to another by means of little black marks on white paper. Kids today can't string letters together into words. They can't form ovals, loops, and humps. They don't know how to get from an *o* to an *s* or an *r* without lifting the pencil off the paper. I hope Mistah Palmer—he of the Method—is dead.

Until recently, I had dismissed my students' intimations of their scribbling inadequacy. Then a *New York Times* writer penned an article on the subject. Only at that point did I realize my students had meant what they said: They felt humiliated and betrayed for a deficiency not of their own making.

Now, for years I have resisted my colleagues' laments about the decline in our students' preparedness. We're just getting old and grumpy, I thought. Alas, I must concede that my students' eager faces deceived me into



wishful thinking. I had long admitted that freshman composition is a remedial exercise since, in theory, students should already be able to put their thoughts into written form before entering an institution ostensibly devoted to the higher learning. But certain compromises with reality must always be made.

As for cursive, in my naïveté I assumed that students who used printed letters for their essay exams were simply seeking maximum legibility. Then at one final exam my casual mention of cursive caused a student momentary panic for fear that I might be going to require it. She wrote a relieved addendum in cursive, and I could understand from her labored, childlike scrawl why she doubted she could generate 800 to 1,000 words in the three-hour period.

Now I am wondering—*this is unbearable*—if I should use the early periods of my composition course to teach cursive! Remediation is one thing. But doing in the thirteenth year what wasn't done in the second and third years? Early retirement starts to look really, really good.

When I consulted a colleague in the Education Department, she confirmed my worst fears. Teachers say they are asked to do too many new things, she explained (I didn't want to know what), and so some old things must go. There are supposedly diminishing returns in teaching cursive in the computer age. So in the name of being practical, we turn minimalist. Only too late will children discover which basic tools they have been deprived of.

Products of our schools, in other words, may soon not be able to sign their names. On their personal checks they may give a whole new meaning to the concept of Generation X.

—Edward E. Ericson, Jr., is an English professor at Calvin College.

POLITICS OVER MERIT

Each year, 6,000 of the most promising high school students are named as National Merit Scholars. Traditionally winners must score in the top one-half of one percent on the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT) and demonstrate extracurricular as well as academic prowess. Yet in recent years, ethnic activists and liberal groups like the ACLU have excoriated

POLS AND BUREAUCRATS BEAT KIDS

On page 33, Jonetta Rose Barras tells how efforts to bring parental choice to Washington, D.C. public schools were squashed by the usual political and bureaucratic suspects. We add two tidbits to her story, both uncovered by the *Washington Times*. First, with one exception, no Senator who voted against the choice measure had ever chosen to send his or her children to the D.C. public schools. Second, a vote for the status quo in those schools—famous for their above-average spending—was a vote to keep the following bureaucratic hierarchy in place:

- D.C. Board of Education
- Division of Human Resources
- Office of School Support Services
- Transportation Division
- Security Division
- Facilities Management Division
- Support Services Division
- Office of the Superintendent
- Communications Branch
- Legal Services Branch
- State Services
- Office of the Vice President (including cluster offices)
- Student Services Division
- Office of the Center for Systemic Educational Change
- Curriculum Content, Instruction, and Assessment Division
- Mathematics, Science, and Technology Division
- Organizational Culture, Human Resource Development, and Training Division
- Student Efficacy, Linkages, and Collaboration Division
- Office of Educational Accountability, Assessment, and Information
- Management and Instructional Technology Division
- Audits and Investigations Division
- Research and Planning Division
- Teacher Education and Certification Division
- Office of Finance and Administration
- Procurement Branch
- Budget Service Division
- Finance Division
- Food Services Division

the program as “culturally biased” because minority students, in comparison to their white counterparts, tend to fare less well on the PSAT, a standardized test administered to over 1 million high school students as a preparation for the SAT.

These accusations, however, are specious. Elaine Detweiler of National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC), the non-profit organization that oversees the process, bluntly states that the Educa-

tional Testing Service (ETS), the company that writes the tests, “takes great lengths to evaluate each item to avoid bias. I think the critics of the test should spend more time examining why these differences exist among different groups.”

Most experts agree on the value of standardized tests like the PSAT, which predict freshmen college year performance better than high school grades. The “cultural bias” crowd, meanwhile,

never explain why Asian students—many of whom are immigrants—excel at these “culturally biased” standardized tests. These critics really have only one complaint against such tests: they do not yield radical equality of results. Unless each ethnic group wins its “fair” proportional share, it is ipso facto proof of test bias.

Despite these dubious assertions, left-leaning advocacy groups have largely succeeded in pressuring the National Merit Scholarship Corporation and the Educational Testing Service to make changes. Since so few minority students perform well enough on the PSAT to qualify for the scholarships, the NMSC and the College Board have separate scholarship subset programs for minority students. The National Achievement Scholarship Program for Outstanding Negro Students, for example, established in 1964 to “compensate for educational injustice,” is now used to ensure equality of results. Each year, the NMSC awards 750 of these scholarships, worth \$3 million. Interestingly, these Black Achievement Scholarships constitute 13 percent of all National Merit Scholarships, which is uncannily proportional to the percentage of African Americans in the general population. In 1983, the Andrew Mellon Foundation helped the College

Board establish a similar National Hispanic Scholar program.

Academic requirements for these minority programs are markedly lower than for the normal Merit Scholarship. Although setting lower expectations for minority students than for whites and Asians easily becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, ethnic activists demand equal results now—and double standards if necessary.

Even the tests themselves have become rigged in hopes of giving favored minority students an edge. Virtually every PSAT test has at least one reading comprehension passage that deals with minority issues. These passages usually fall into one of two categories: self-esteem-boosting passages that lavishly praise minority achievements, or articles that deplore the terrible racism facing minorities today. One test, for instance, had a passage on how black female writers had to “cut through layers of institutionalized racism and sexism.” Whether these multicultural reading selections actually abet minority students is questionable, but the politicization of the tests is palpable.

Some critics even claim that the test discriminates against female students as well. The proof? More male students win Merit Scholarships than females. FairTest, a leftist lobbying group, said using the

PSAT was “extraordinarily irresponsible” and called for the abandonment of the test. The ACLU filed a complaint with the Education Department on behalf of FairTest, alleging sexual discrimination by the Educational Testing Service and the College Board.

In fact, the test, if anything, discriminates against male students. The NMSC doubles test-takers’ verbal score while only counting their math score once. This aids female students, who score better on average on the verbal section, while boys perform better on the math section. The National Merit Scholarship Corporation denies that this scoring system was designed to aid females, but regardless of intent, it nevertheless gives female students an advantage. Of course, FairTest never complains about the “bias” of this scoring system.

This brouhaha over National Merit Scholarships reflects a larger trend in academia. To curry favor with obstreperous special-interest groups, educational institutions routinely subvert academic standards, establish racially separate programs, and accept the argument that rewarding achievement is tantamount to racism. All this, ironically, under the banner of “fairness.”

—Kenneth Lee, a National Merit Finalist, is a student at Cornell University.

WHAT INTELLECTUAL STANDARDS?

“The blow that can’t be brushed off is the one that’s self-inflicted.” So writes Alan Sokal, self-professed “leftist,” after having dealt a body blow to “some fashionable sectors of the American academic Left.” Specifically, he perpetrated a spectacular hoax on the editors of *Social Text*, a very hip journal of “cultural studies.” This trendy academic field in the humanities is dedicated to absolute belief in the idea that truth absolutely does not exist. And they mean it—not even “laws” like gravity or physical reality itself are “true.” They’re just “socially constructed” beliefs forced upon the huddled masses still trapped under the heels of the running dogs of capitalism.

All this was too much for Sokal, a physics professor at New York University.

Reprinted by permission of John Trever, Albuquerque Journal

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 1996



SEE ARTICLE ON PAGE 61

So he concocted his own parody of a cultural studies essay: "I structured the article around the silliest quotes about mathematics and physics" already made by cultural studies' leading lights, and "invented an argument praising them" with no regard for "any standards of evidence or logic."

The same day that article was published in *Social Text*, a different journal published Sokal's confession laying bare his prank. The cultural studies crowd was not amused. The *New York Times* ran a

front-page story on the uproar, as well as an indignant op-ed piece by Stanley Fish, executive director of Duke University Press, the publisher of *Social Text*.

Amazingly, these proud enemies of truth attacked Sokal's untruthfulness, complaining that such dishonesty threatened "intellectual standards."

But nothing they said changed the fact that they could not distinguish between a learned essay and intentional gibberish.

Their intellectual standards, as Sokal pointed out, included not checking the "science" he perpetrated (obvious nonsense to any "undergraduate physics or math major"), and not requiring "anything resembling a logical sequence of thought...only citations of authority, plays on words, strained analogies, and bald assertions."

No, Sokal explained, the only thing that mattered to these intellectuals was his conclusion: "Post-



VMI, RIP

The Supreme Court's recent ruling against state-supported single-sex education at the Virginia Military Institute may or may not be the death knell for all single-sex education, public and private, higher and lower. But one thing is certain: Friends and foes of the decision agree on what was at stake:

"It is precisely VMI's attachment to such old-fashioned concepts as manly 'honor' that has made it, and the system it represents, the target of those who today succeed in abolishing public single-sex education."

—dissenting opinion of Justice Scalia in *United States v. Virginia*

"I also don't hesitate to say that women will change VMI. Change is, after all, the point."

—Ellen Goodman, *Washington Post*, June 29, 1996

"The people most pleased by the court's killing of the unique institution...are people who describe themselves as defenders of 'diversity' and 'choice.'"

—George F. Will, *Washington Post*, June 30, 1996

modern science" provides "powerful intellectual support for the progressive political project." Readers wanting to study cultures where no objective truths are allowed to hinder a progressive political project should consult the texts of Solzhenitsyn and Orwell.

—J.B.

GUERRILLA THEATER

In a recent newspaper article, AEI distinguished fellow Lynne Cheney named Richard Ohmann of Wesleyan University on a list of professors for whom "politics in the classroom is not only acceptable, but...a point of pride." Miffed at this classification, Ohmann protested he believed no such thing.

In reply, Cheney turned to the Wesleyan course catalogue and this description of Ohmann's American Studies course: "A collectively taught and student-organized course, it confronts the traditional character of teacher-student relations by rotating teaching responsibilities. The course challenges the hierarchy, oppression, and exploitation in modern American culture with a variety of critical analyses and alternative proposals. With the guidance of two student facilitators, groups of eight to 12 students will plan and read the course's agenda: They will educate themselves. Topics cover an introduction to current trends in leftist thought, including anarchism, ecology,

feminism, Marxism, and ethnic perspectives. The class will deepen its understanding of these views with an analysis of sexuality, heterosexuality, gender, family, race, community, society, and liberalism. This course integrates the personal with the political. Projects have included guerrilla theater, community organizing, and campus activism."

Poor Dr. Ohmann. We can't imagine what Mrs. Cheney was thinking of.

CO-ED VICTIM COMPETITION

We hear a great deal on how girls are victimized in school. But veteran debunker Christina Hoff Sommers, writing in the June 12 *Education Week*, says boys may be the bigger victims: "By most reasonable measures, girls are faring better than boys. Boys get lower grades. More often than girls, they drop out and are held back. Far more boys than girls suffer from learning disabilities. (In 1990, three times as many boys as girls were enrolled in special education programs.) Of the 1.3 million American children taking Ritalin, the drug commonly prescribed for attention-deficit disorder, three-fourths are boys. More boys than girls are involved in crime and with alcohol and drugs. Significantly fewer boys than girls are going on to college."



Indicators

SCHOOL CHOICE AND FAMILY SATISFACTION

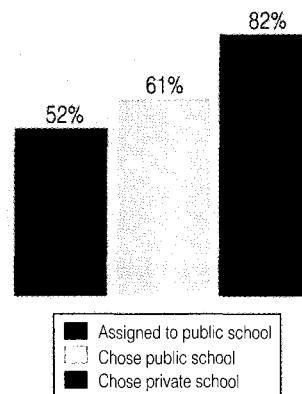
Nearly a fifth of all U.S. children attend a school other than their assigned public school. Some go to private or religious schools, some are homeschooled, some attend a public school they have been allowed to transfer into. Figures show that the people walking away from their local public schools are rural as well as urban, low-income as well as middle-class. Black students are actually more likely than whites to opt for a school other than their government-assigned institution.

Do the parents and children who choose some alternative school actually end up better off? Yes: A survey published recently by the National Center for Education Statistics shows that just 52 percent of parents with children in assigned public institutions report being "very satisfied" with their youngster's school. **Parents who were able to choose schools were far happier**, as the accompanying graph indicates.

Parents with school choice were more

satisfied on every specific count—"child is challenged at school," "child enjoys school," "teachers maintain discipline," "students and teachers respect each other," and so forth.

Parents "very satisfied" with children's schools, by level of school choice



Source: National Center for Education Statistics, 1995.

VERY PRIVATE CHOICES

Though teachers' unions ferociously oppose any reforms that would allow other parents to choose non-governmental schools, in their own families, **an astonishing number of public school teachers pull their kids out of the public schools.**

Public school teachers sending their children to private schools, by city:

Baltimore	44%	Los Angeles	39%
Boston	49	Miami	32
Cleveland	53	Milwaukee	45
Dayton	40	New Orleans	46
Detroit	36	Pittsburgh	47
Grand Rapids	55	Richmond	36
Honolulu	5		

Source: 1990 census data compiled by Denis Doyle.

MORE DOLLARS ≠ BETTER SCHOOLS

When alarm over the state of American schools first arose in the 1980s, the education establishment blamed a lack of resources. Earnest, concerned Americans took them at their word and threw money at the problem. Calculated on a per-student basis, **funding for public schools jumped 50 percent above and beyond inflation from 1980 to 1996.** The total national treasure devoted to education rose from about \$330 billion to \$540 billion in constant 1996 dollars.

The largest portion of that downpour of money went to teachers. Nationwide, public school teachers now average around \$40,000 in pay for their nine months of

work. The government reports that their salaries now run between 1½ and 2 times the salaries of teachers at private schools.

One budget line has grown even faster than spending on teachers: Spending on bureaucrats. Amazingly, 25¢ of every dollar spent on U.S. education now goes to salaries of non-teachers (far higher than in other countries). This covers administrators, central office clerks, examiners of regulatory paperwork, affirmative action officers, "special ed" managers, security guards, aides, social workers, and others who never teach a lesson. In many places now, **between 40 and 50 percent of school system employees are non-teaching personnel.**

The explosion of new education spending over the last 15 years made public employee unions happy, but there is no indication it fixed our school problems. We might have anticipated this: There is a hefty accumulation of research showing that **spending per pupil has little to do with successful outcomes.** Not even lowering the student-teacher ratio, that favorite magic bullet of education budget boosters, does much to improve learning.

The Japanese are living proof that more money and teachers are not the keys to good elementary and secondary schooling. Japan spends 4.8 percent of its (smaller) Gross Domestic Product on education, versus 7.2 percent in the U.S. Japanese teachers are not highly paid, and the average class size is 32 students at the elementary level, 38 in secondary school—much higher than U.S. levels. Yet outcomes are impressive.

The things that matter in education, the Japanese have realized, are **effort, discipline, and high standards.** Teachers and students work harder in Japan to meet more rigorous requirements. The school year is 240 days, versus 180 in the U.S., and each day is longer. Twice as much classroom time is spent learning math at the elementary level. There is an accepted body of common information that all Japanese students must master, and competency tests are enforced strictly. These are the keys to school success in Japan—and perhaps elsewhere.