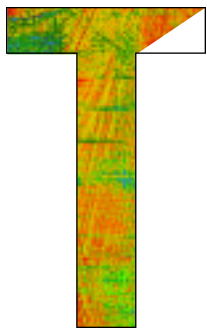


The 12th Bracey Report On the Condition of Public Education

What profit it a child to pass the MCAS, FCAT, TAKS, or CASE, if he lose his Epicurean aesthetic? Mr. Bracey asks.

BY GERALD W. BRACEY



THE BASIC technology of the Bracey Reports is the drawer. Each year after my August deadline, I empty the contents of a four-inch-deep drawer and then start filling it again until the following June. In June I dump the contents on the dining room table to be categorized. This year, there were actually $2\frac{1}{2}$ drawers of collected articles, which means, since the *Kappan* editors will not give me the whole issue, that some material must perforce be omitted. Important as these issues are, what follows says little or nothing about the reading wars, the vagaries of various state testing programs, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), dropouts, charter schools, or, especially, preschool education, which I hope to treat separately at some time. A report on PISA (Program of International Student Assessment) was dropped because of space limits and will occupy the November Research column.

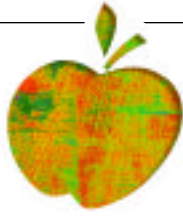
TESTING

Just when you thought there was nothing bizarre left to say about testing come these reports from Georgia. Actually, the Georgia stories are continuations of past travesties in the Peach State. Readers may recall that Gwinnett County sent one of its school police officers all the way to Vermont to harass and threaten Susan Ohanian over her alleged sabotaging of the

Gwinnett County Gateway Test. Gwinnett also tried to fire and revoke the certification of a teacher who had posted online six items that he deemed invalid after the test was given. The Georgia Professional Standards Commission decided the act merited no more than a six-month suspension, and the teacher has appealed to the superior court in Atlanta.

The Gwinnett School Police, who come off as the Gestapo, badgered parent Terry Knight and her husband even worse than they did Ohanian. Officer Jim Keinard (who also visited Ohanian and interviewed me by phone) interrogated Knight at length. According to the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, which ob-

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A BARREL OF GOLDEN APPLES

As in years past, the Rotten Apple awards will be put up on my website, www.america-tomorrow.com/bracey. They will appear on New Year's Day 2003. In the meantime, eight new Golden Apple awards are announced within this report.

tained a tape of the interview, Keinard repeatedly told Knight that “fellow parents in the Concerned Parents of Gwinnett were going to jail, and if she didn’t cooperate, she would go to jail as well.” The officer said he had “ironclad evidence” against her. (He has yet to produce it in the ensuing two years.) He even told her that, if she didn’t cooperate, her children would be taken from her.¹

Funny thing was, Terry Knight wasn’t even the right person. There was another Terry somebody who was the “guilty” party. The Knights said Keinard had lied to them, and they asked, If a police officer is willing to lie, what else might he be willing to do? Not comfortable waiting for an answer to that question, the Knights moved to Pennsylvania.

According to the *Journal-Constitution*, the real culprit behind the intimidation is J. Alvin Wilbanks, the superintendent of the Gwinnett County Schools and a person “intent on using Gateway to establish himself as a leader in the nationwide standardized testing movement.” To some extent, Wilbanks has succeeded. Secretary of Education Rod Paige appointed him to the committee that drafted the federal regulations for the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act.

For comic relief, let us now turn to a story that the *New York Times* ran under the headline “The Elderly Man and the Sea?” In New York, a Brooklyn mother with a master’s degree in English, Jeanne Heifetz, noticed that a New York Regents test had modified a passage from a book. At first, she thought it was just a glitch of some kind. Then she saw another passage that was altered even more. Two accidents? Heifetz didn’t think so, and she was right.

It turns out that the New York Department of Education has “sensitivity review guidelines” to ensure

that no child feels uncomfortable taking the test — as if the test’s importance didn’t already guarantee butterflies (recall that the SAT 9 now comes with instructions on what to do if a child vomits on the answer sheet). What sort of alterations did Heifetz notice? All mentions of Judaism were removed from excerpts from Isaac Bashevis Singer, and the sentence “Jews are Jews and Gentiles are Gentiles” was entirely deleted from an excerpt from *An American Childhood*, by Annie Dillard.

Indeed, few things seemed too trivial for New York’s sensitivity police. “Skinny” became “thin,” “fat” became “heavy,” “gringo lady” became “American lady,” “fine California wine and seafood” became “fine California seafood,” and on and on. In a passage dealing with Frank Conroy’s memoir, *Stop-Time*, “hell” turned into “heck,” and the censors excised all references to sex, religion, nudity, and potential violence (in the form of two boys about to kill a snake).

Naturally, Heifetz’ discovery offended many people, including the authors of the bowdlerized texts, many of whom she took the trouble to contact. The National Coalition Against Censorship, the Association of American Publishers, the New York Civil Liberties Union, and PEN (Poets, Playwrights, Editors, Essayists, and Novelists) sent a joint letter of protest to Richard Mills, the state education commissioner.

Roseanne DeFabio, one of Mills’ assistant commissioners, uttered a statement that became an instant classic: “Even the most wonderful writers don’t write literature for children to take on a test.”² Exactly.

Within two days, Mills had left DeFabio twisting in the wind, declaring that the altering of texts would be terminated. That announcement came after the practice was zapped by Diane Ravitch in the *New York Times*,³ Anna Quindlen in *Newsweek*,⁴ Margo Adler on “All Things Considered,” and the editors of the *Washington Times*.⁵ Quindlen, who had suffered similar editing from ETS, observed that *The Catcher in the Rye*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and *The Merchant of Venice* would all fail to meet the standards of the Regents exam. “Here is the most shocking question among the New York state guidelines,” Quindlen wrote. “Does the material assume values not shared by all test takers? There is no book worth reading, no poem worth writing, no essay worth analyzing that assumes the same values for all. That sentence is the death of intellectual engagement.”

The critics voiced concern over the ethics and aesthetics of chopping passages. None pointed out that

the sensitivity guidelines defeated their own purpose. The guidelines were intended to ensure that students taking the test did not become “uncomfortable.” One can only imagine their discomfiture when asked questions whose answers *depended* on the deleted passages. In *Learning All the Time*, John Holt discussed differences between the way the Suzuki method of violin instruction is applied in Japan and in the United States. Apparently perceiving that this discussion might offend *somebody*, the sensitivity monitors in New York deleted the passages from the excerpt on the test. Yet the students were asked questions about the differences. Even more egregious, in Chekhov’s story “The Upheaval,” a wealthy woman strip searches her servants in an effort to find a missing brooch. This passage was omitted. Then the students were asked to write an essay, based on the story, on the meaning of human dignity.

Meanwhile, William Cala, superintendent of schools in Fairport, New York, reports that since the new Regents Examinations were introduced in 1999, the following consequences have occurred:

- passing rates have declined;
- the performance gap between large urban centers and other public school districts has widened;
- IEP diplomas have increased 21.6%;
- students have been moved into GED programs to hide the dropout rate;
- staff development now addresses test scoring and alignment of curricula to tests, not teacher improvement;
- teachers in the tested grades are fleeing the profession or asking for transfers to other grades;
- the New York City dropout rate has increased 2% each year; and
- the dropout rate for English-language learners increased 12% in 2001.⁶

Meanwhile, on the Left Coast, the Los Angeles and San Francisco school boards voted against California’s testing programs and voted for the study of alternative assessments. Opponents of the tests in both cities cited correlations between a school’s socioeconomic status and its passing rate. Roy Romer, the superintendent in Los Angeles, cautioned that the votes would actually hurt students. Since some of the language in the measures implied that the tests were racist, Romer feared that minority students would use that designation as a reason not to prepare for them.⁷

The Center on Education Policy injected a small amount of sanity into the asylum with Nancy Kober’s

“Teaching to the Test,” in *TestTalk for Leaders*, the first of a series of bulletins on testing.⁸ Kober discusses many bad practices and some good ones. She observes, as I have often done in these pages, that rising test scores don’t seem to generalize to any other index of achievement. This conclusion has been most recently reaffirmed by Audrey Amrein and David Berliner of Arizona State University. They found that, in a number of states with high-stakes testing programs, while scores were rising on the high-stakes tests, math scores on the SAT, the ACT, and the NAEP fell.⁹

THE EDISON SAGA

More than one observer has likened the flamboyant Christopher Whittle to Harold Hill of *The Music Man*. In more kindly fashion, Jay Johnstone, who oversaw the liquidation of Whittle Communications, said, “People say he creates his own reality, and thus can do things other people can’t. But the flip side is: reality is just that. Chris has difficulty accepting any kind of defeat. He can’t even visualize losing.”¹⁰

In 2001 and 2002, Whittle, founder of Edison Schools, Inc., might well have felt more like Cinderella than Harold Hill. Not only was his carriage turning into a pumpkin, but his whole universe threatened to do so as well. In 1991 Whittle’s original grandiose plan called for creating a system of private schools. He estimated that it would take one billion dollars for a “prototype” of his scheme and another two billion dollars to ramp it up to a national scale.



The Life Isn’t Worth Living Without Good Schools Award

goes to an unnamed New Yorker. After Bush Administration officials said that another terrorist attack was a matter of when, not if, *New York Times* columnist Bill Keller wrote about the possible consequences of the explosion of a nuclear device in the city.¹ Many of his readers wanted more specific ideas on how to survive. “One mordant New Yorker wrote in asking for a list of neighborhoods likely to remain beyond the range of radioactive fallout — ‘and please indicate which have the best school systems.’”

1. Bill Keller, “Nuclear Nightmares,” *New York Times*, 26 May 2002; and idem, “Fear Factor,” *New York Times*, 15 June 2002.

Where would Whittle get such funds? From bankers and investors, he said. Investors? Investors like Time Warner or Philips Electronics, which had lost nearly \$400 million in the collapse of Whittle's earlier excellent adventure, Channel One? Probably not.

Whittle's grand scheme actually depended on the first President Bush and his secretary of education, Lamar Alexander — like Whittle, a Tennessean. As governor of Tennessee, Alexander had received \$125,000 from Whittle as a paid consultant. He also purchased Channel One stock for \$10,000, which Whittle bought back for \$330,000. When Whittle announced the Edison Project in 1991, Bush was riding high after the Gulf War and was considered unbeatable in 1992. Bush and Alexander had kept up Ronald Reagan's efforts to get voucher legislation through Congress. If they succeeded, students would be able to use vouchers to attend Edison schools. But the unthinkable happened. Bill Clinton moved into the White House, and Bush and Alexander left town. Whittle had to fall back on the expedient of managing a few public schools.

Whittle's charisma charmed investors, especially Merrill Lynch, and he got what some analysts considered ridiculously large lines of credit, even in the speculative Nineties. In 2001, though, the clock had been ticking for 10 profitless years. Early in the year, it appeared that Edison would land a contract in New York City, a venue that would certainly give the company the visibility it needed. The deal seemed a lock — the stipulations for the contract excluded every potential bidder except Edison.

But the plan, constructed by Harold Levy, then chancellor of the New York Public Schools, contained one fatal flaw — for Edison. The proposal required parents in the schools Levy wanted Edison to run to approve of the takeover. Initially, Levy gave Edison management of the vote but backed off after community organizations expressed outrage at this fox-guarding-the-henhouse arrangement. Levy gave community groups permission to circulate anti-Edison literature, and parents voted against Edison, 4-1.¹¹ Edison's stock, already down from a high of \$38 a share, fell from \$20 to \$14.

Edison looked to be in position for another star turn later in the year. In August 2001, Tom Ridge, then governor of Pennsylvania, gave Edison a sweetheart deal: a no-bid \$2.7-million contract to “study” the Philadelphia school system and make recommendations on how to “fix” it. (In fact, under superintendent David Hornbeck, Philadelphia had surmounted dwindling

state funds and had made remarkable progress.) Again, cries of outrage were heard. “This stinks of conflict of interest from the top to the bottom,” said Alex Molnar of Arizona State University.¹²

How Edison managed to spend 2.7 million taxpayer dollars in two months is not clear. Edison refused to open its books “as a matter of policy.” The *Philadelphia Daily News* accused it of using \$85,000 to buy influence. Edison admitted that money changed hands but claimed that the funds “came from general corporate sources, not the \$2.7 million state contract.”¹³ Edison also awarded a contract to a consulting firm, The Neiman Group. The contract contained \$430,000 to advertise Edison in Philadelphia. Until two days before the contract was inked, Neiman's vice president for public relations, Tim Reeves, had been a close advisor to Gov. Ridge and his successor, Mark Schweiker. Under Pennsylvania law, the arrangement was legal, although observers thought it inappropriate and unethical. Edison spokesman Adam Tucker poohpooed the critics. “We are not a politically oriented company,” he said.¹⁴ The record does not say if Tucker was smirking.

After examining Edison's report to Gov. Ridge, the Council of the Great City Schools noted that it “contains a number of factual errors.” In addition, it “uses weak techniques and questionable assumptions” to draw conclusions that “appear to have been reached before any data were analyzed or any interviews conducted.”¹⁵

Elsewhere, I have detailed the events and conflicts of Edison-in-Philadelphia.¹⁶ Suffice it to say here that



The Get Thee to a Nunnery, Rick Mills Award goes to Jeanne Heifetz.

Brooklyn mother and literature lover Heifetz discovered that State Education Commissioner Richard Mills, the New York Regents, and the New York Department of Education were following the great tradition of Thomas Bowdler, whose edited version of Shakespeare gave us the word “bowdlerize.” The state department's “sensitivity guidelines” led it to alter literary passages used in the Regents Examinations, removing anything that might cause children anxiety — as if the tests themselves don't. See the section on Testing for details.

Edison's study concluded that 55 top Philadelphia administrators should be replaced with Edison appointees and that Edison should run 45 Philadelphia schools.¹⁷ A School Reform Commission, assembled by Gov. Ridge and Philadelphia Mayor John Street, gave Edison only 20 schools. Although this was twice as many as any other Edison contract, it displeased Wall Street, and Edison's stock plummeted toward a dollar a share.

It appeared Edison would have trouble raising the \$30 million to \$50 million it would need for its Philadelphia enterprise. But the company's perennial champion, Merrill Lynch, came up with another \$20 million, as did a little-known investment firm, Chelsey Capital.

In May and June, if the carriage hadn't yet become a pumpkin, it certainly lost most of its wheels. Edison lost contracts in Massachusetts,¹⁸ Connecticut,¹⁹ and Michigan.²⁰ The Texas Education Agency lowered two of Edison's seven Dallas schools from "acceptable" to "low performing."²¹ Dallas Associate Superintendent William Webster delivered an evaluation to the Dallas School Board that concluded that the seven Edison schools had not kept pace with regular city schools with the same demographic characteristics.²² (Webster has a long background in research and evaluation, so he has the credentials to make the study stick.) The Dallas School Board decided to reevaluate Edison's contract and terminated it.²³ With the loss of schools in Massachusetts and Michigan, three of Edison's original four schools are no longer in the fold. (Sherman, Texas, had canceled earlier.)

Edison had touted its Wichita schools as models for the rest of the district, but Wichita canceled two of the four contracts, citing falling test scores, high teacher and pupil turnover, and possible cheating on tests.²⁴ A state takeover of Edison's schools in Inkster, Michigan, seems likely.²⁵ The school board in Baltimore, "in stinging comments, quashed" Edison's proposed expansion there.²⁶ A report from Philadelphia suburb Chester Upland, where Edison manages nine schools, found dramatic increases in truancy, violence, and suspensions.²⁷ Clarke County, Nevada, withheld a \$3-million payment to Edison because of unfulfilled contractual obligations.²⁸ Dade County, Florida, did likewise.²⁹

About the same time that Edison backer Merrill Lynch was paying the SEC \$100 million for publicly touting stocks its brokers had privately called junk and American investors seemed to be suffering an account-

ing scandal a day, Edison disclosed that it had been keeping mum on an SEC investigation of itself for three months. It had counted as income teacher salaries paid directly by school districts, about 40% of its total. Edison defended the practice at first, then gave in to the SEC.³⁰ Edison's concession came too late to stave off class action suits charging Edison officers with "a series of materially false and misleading statements."³¹

With only a few weeks left before the start of school, two investigations sent Edison's stock to a low of 46 cents a share (its high had been \$38). First, Pennsylvania Auditor General Bob Casey announced that he was seeking an audit of how the original \$2.7 million contract was awarded (Why wasn't it put out for competitive bid as the law requires?) and how the money was spent. He accused Charles Zogby, Pennsylvania's secretary of education and a strong Edison ally, of trying to block his investigation.³²

Five days later, the U.S. Department of Education's inspector general announced he would investigate whether "Edison Schools improperly conspired with state officials to corrupt the company's contract negotiations with the state." The investigation was launched after Zogby demanded that Philadelphia spend \$1,500 more per pupil at the takeover schools than at regular schools — the precise sum that Edison had asked for.³³

In mid-August, Dallas,³⁴ Bibb County (Macon), Georgia,³⁵ and Rochester, New York,³⁶ canceled contracts. Edison's stock swooned at 27 cents a share.

Editors at the *New York Times* examined the disaster at Edison and made the startling observation that education is labor intensive. They reached the equally startling conclusion that it "may never be profitable on the scale that the stock market requires."³⁷ Do tell.

NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

Christopher Cerf and Sarah Bruce Durkee offered the following song, titled "No Child Left Behind," and sung in the mood of "an upbeat gospel":

We're here to thank our president
For signing this great bill,
That's right! Yeah,
Research shows we know the way,
It's time we showed the will.

Cerf and Durkee receive \$4 million from the U.S. Department of Education for a children's television show. Cerf is also the chief operating officer of Edi-



The Businesses Outperform God Award and The Am I Missing Something Here? Award

go to Doug Oplinger and Dennis Willard of the *Akron Beacon Journal*. Even given that there appears to be more education dirt to dig up in Ohio than in most states, Oplinger and Willard do an exceptional job of investigative reporting. Their six-part series on Ohio charter schools in 2000 was a classic, revealing that much of the program there is driven more by politics and greed than by idealism.¹ Their articles in spring 2002 on tax breaks and “class-size” reduction earn them their two prizes.²

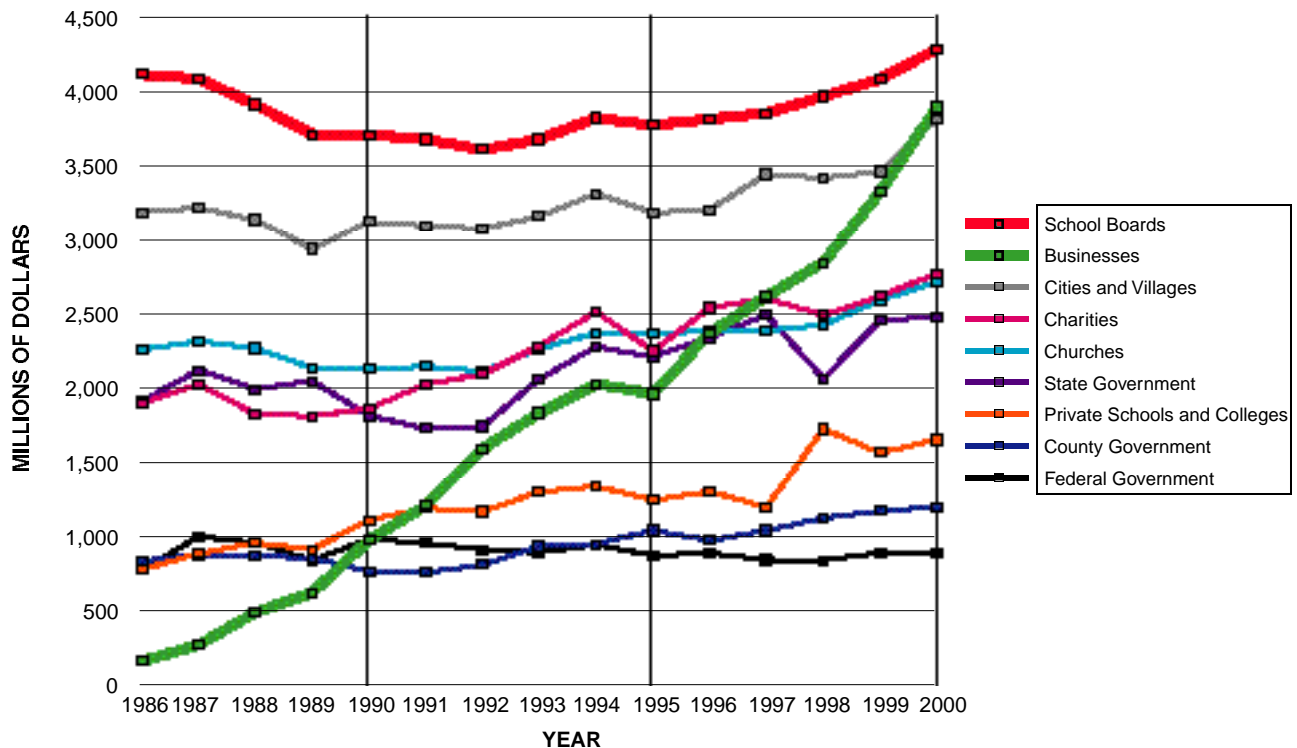
Business and industry like to brag about their partnerships with schools and about how much money they contribute through them. In the late 1980s, Oplinger starting collecting information on the value of tax-sheltered property in Ohio that was owned

by nine kinds of institutions: charities, churches, private schools and colleges, county government, cities and villages, state government, federal government, local school boards, and businesses. As can be seen in Figure 1, school boards topped the list of owners of tax-exempt properties at the beginning and end of the analysis. While private school property values rose a little over the years, most trend lines remained relatively flat — except the one for businesses. From dead last in 1986, businesses zoom to second place, just behind school boards, in 2000. The value of tax-exempt property owned by school boards rose a scant 3.5% during the 15-year period; the value of such property owned by businesses soared by 480%.

“In Ohio, businesses now get more property tax breaks than God,” reads the story’s lead sentence. If the trend has continued, business has by now surpassed education as well.

Ironically enough, it was Sen. Howard Metzen-

FIGURE 1.
Ohio Property Tax Exemptions (Adjusted for Inflation)



baum (D-Ohio) who saw the problem some years ago:

In speech after speech, it is our corporate CEOs who state that an educated, literate work force is the key to American competitiveness. They pontificate on the importance of education. They point out their magnanimous corporate contributions to education in one breath, and then they pull the tax base out from under local schools in the next. Businesses criticize the job our schools are doing and then proceed to nail down every tax break they can get, further eroding the school's ability to do the job.³

Willard and Oplinger also noticed that an Ohio charter school, the Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow (ECOT), had received \$362,000 from a bill designed to reduce class size in Ohio's disadvantaged urban schools. This struck them as curious because ECOT has no actual classrooms. As an online educational enterprise, it offers material to children in their homes. "Children from all over Ohio learn at home. They correspond occasionally with an ECOT teacher, often via computer. In most cases there is only one student per home."⁴

ECOT has also found itself in hot water with the Ohio Department of Education because it could not substantiate how many students it had or how much time they spent learning. It has to repay the state \$1.65 million and will be audited this year for enrollment and learning time. Enron and WorldCom on a small scale? Who says education can't learn from business?

Projections for cyberschools in Ohio indicate that, within five years, they could be generating about \$50 million annually, with almost 50% of that pure profit. At least one legislator has called for a moratorium on cyberschools until some of the financial issues are resolved.

1. The series ran in December 2000 and is summarized in Gerald W. Bracey, *The War Against America's Public Schools* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon/Longman, 2002), pp. 98-100.

2. Doug Oplinger and Dennis J. Willard, "Business Breaks Costing Schools," *Akron Beacon Journal*, 10 April 2002, p. A-1; and idem, "Charter School Gets Class-Size Incentives," *Akron Beacon Journal*, 30 April 2002, p. A-1.

3. Quoted in Alex Molnar, *Giving Kids the Business* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1996), p. 7.

4. Oplinger and Willard, "Charter School Gets Class-Size Incentives."

son Schools, Inc. Onward and upward, I guess.

Some superintendents and principals have begun to feel a Big Brother aspect to NCLB. No, not just from its testing requirements. They have started receiving requests from military recruiters to supply the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of high school juniors and seniors. The law requires them to comply. Of course, I doubt that the recruiters slogged through the 1,184 pages of the law to find this section, so someone in either the White House or the U.S. Department of Education must have slipped them the word. Or perhaps the military lobbied for the provision. The law also forbids schools from banning the Boy Scouts of America from using school property because of that organization's anti-homosexual stance.

Aside from those provisions, NCLB is a trap, a Trojan Horse, whatever — choose your metaphor. Behind its idealistic name lies the cynical reality. Schools will fail in such numbers that those on the Right will once again shout, "The public school system as we know it has proved that it cannot reform itself. It is an ossified government monopoly." In fact, Chester E. Finn, Jr., former assistant secretary of education, screamed precisely those words in the *Wall Street Journal* four years ago, so we know that my conclusion is not hyperbole.³⁸

That NCLB should lead to shouts for privatization, vouchers, and tuition tax credits should not surprise us. The Bush Administration has been deregulating every pollution-producing industry in sight, while refusing to find money to continue Superfund environmental cleanups. Why would it then write a lengthy law putting schools in a regulatory straitjacket if not for some ulterior purpose?

Recall that the original legislation contained voucher provisions. Congress, noting that voters in California and Michigan had voted down vouchers by roughly 70% to 30% (in spite of voucher advocates having outspent opponents two to one), stripped the voucher provisions from the bill. But Congress apparently was unable to strip them from the Administration's game plan.

The principal infernal mechanism in NCLB for bashing schools is the concept of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). A nutty concept from the get-go, AYP means, in the words of radical (his term) critic Denis Doyle, "The nation is about to be inundated in a sea of bad news" about schools.³⁹ Doyle later commented that schools were about to get "poleaxed" by AYP.⁴⁰

Any state that wants NCLB money must agree to



The Northwest Mountie Award

goes to Caroline Grannan. Grannan is a San Francisco mom and founder of PASA, Parents Advocating School Accountability. In addition to encouraging accountability, PASA supports charter schools. PASA does not support vouchers or for-profit education firms such as Edison Schools, Inc. *Especially* Edison Schools, Inc.

Grannan began her dissemination efforts after seeing Edison test score numbers in the local media and the *Wall Street Journal* that she knew to be false. Now Grannan tracks down anything and everything written about Edison in media around the nation, then posts the articles to mailing lists and archives them at the PASA site (www.pasasf.org). Anything you want to read about Edison, you can find there.

test all children annually in grades 3 through 8 in reading and math and, two years later, in science as well. The tests must be based on and aligned with “challenging” standards. They must be technically adequate, and states must provide evidence of validity. By 2014, all students must have reached the “proficient” level on the tests. In the meantime, each school must show AYP, not only for its student body overall but also separately for all major demographic groups within the school. And pigs will fly.

Initial estimates are that in most places 80% to 90% of all schools will fail. In North Carolina, singled out by numerous commentators for progress, 73% of the state’s elementary and middle schools would have failed if NCLB had been in place last year. Even 51% of those honored by the state for “exemplary growth” would not pass the AYP criterion.⁴¹

Now consider that the “bad news” Doyle predicts will arrive on the heels of half a century of nearly constant criticism of schools. Forty-five years ago this month, the Soviet Union launched Sputnik, the first man-made satellite, and an ungrateful nation blamed the schools for letting the Russians reach space first. Lots of critiques followed, notably *Crisis in the Classroom* (1970), and in 1983 that golden treasury of selected, spun, and distorted statistics, *A Nation at Risk*. It was soon after *Risk* that we began to hear about “restructuring” schools and replacing them with charters, EMOs

(education management organizations), and voucher-funded private schools.

Doyle and I are not the only ones to have noticed the ideological underpinnings of the new law or to predict dire consequences. Stan Karp, a teacher in Paterson, New Jersey, also pointed out the coming train wreck:

When this new federal testing scheme begins to document, as it inevitably will, an inability to reach its unrealistic and underfunded goals, it will provide new ammunition for a push to fundamentally “overhaul” and reshape public schooling. Conservatives will press their critique of public education as a “failed monopoly” that must be “reformed” through market measures and steps towards privatization.⁴²

Given that Finn’s earlier high dudgeon was caused merely by some bogus data from the Third International Mathematics and Science Study, one can only imagine what kind of phony apoplectic fit he and other commentators will throw over AYP (phony because they already know what will happen).

After the Supreme Court’s decision that the Cleveland voucher program passes constitutional muster, many commentators said it would be no big deal. A decade ago, market theorists touted vouchers as a panacea for the entire school system. Now most people speak of vouchers in terms of providing limited assistance to a small number of poor parents trapped in “failing” inner-city schools. Suburbanites like their schools and don’t want vouchers. The impact of AYP, though, means that even middle-class schools that people now think of as good will be labeled as failing. The law aims to plant doubt in the minds of people who are currently comfortable with the schools their children attend.

As if AYP weren’t enough, the word “proficient” sets a trap, too. What does it mean? According to the law, each state will define it. Clearly, though, much of the discussion of “proficient” will take place in terms of the NAEP achievement levels. But very few children attain the proficient level on NAEP tests. Indeed, the folks at CRESST (Center for Research in Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing) point out that even getting every child to the NAEP “basic” level would constitute an enormous challenge.⁴³ (They also affirm a study described in the 11th Bracey Report showing that year-to-year changes in school-level test scores are volatile and often stem from factors that

have nothing to do with instruction.) Under NCLB, state-level NAEP testing moves from voluntary to mandatory and will be used to “verify” the state’s results.

We already know that in most states a much higher proportion of students reaches the proficient level on state tests than on NAEP tests. The verification process, therefore, will lead to accusations that the schools are still failing and that state and local officials have been lying to parents about school quality for years.

This outcome would be dreadful enough if the NAEP achievement levels were valid. But they are not. They have been rejected by everyone who has ever studied them, which includes CRESST, the Government Accounting Office, the National Academy of Education, and the National Academy of Sciences.

The Let’s Get Our Priorities in Order, George

Award goes to David Broder of the *Washington Post*. Broder has taken some flack on these pages over the years, but his column of 9 January 2002 was a treasure. Broder limned the basic facts of what is known about what happens when poor children get a good dose of high-quality preschool programs. Broder also points out the atrocious pay received by most of those who care for young children.



After acknowledging the goals of No Child Left Behind, Broder declared:

To impose new requirements on those [underperforming] schools while shortchanging the process of preparing their students to learn is worse than self-defeating. It is a surefire method for frustrating parents, teachers, and students, guaranteeing that this nation will not meet its educational goals.

There are problems we do not know how to solve, but this is not one of them. The evidence that high-quality education beginning at age 3 or 4 will pay lifetime dividends is overwhelming. The only question is whether we will make the needed investment.¹

That’s certainly the question.

1. David Broder, “Facing Reality on Early Education,” *Washington Post*, 9 January 2002, p. A-19.



The Wonderful Sentiments Award

goes to President George W. Bush. In a speech on 10 April 2002, President Bush said, “Our children are gifts to be loved and protected, not products to be designed and manufactured.” Exactly right. Unfortunately, the President was not addressing the proper treatment of children in schools and families. He uttered this statement in an anti-cloning speech to Congress. No such enlightened sentiments are evident in his education agenda.

“Fundamentally flawed” was the NAS conclusion. In the past, I awarded a “Rotten Apple” to the U.S. Department of Education for continuing to use the levels. The media should get one as well for their lapdog reporting of them.

The NAEP achievement levels have a number of flaws, the most obvious of which is that they don’t accord with other findings. As I have pointed out before, American 9-year-olds finished second in the world in reading among 27 nations in *How in the World Do Students Read?* Yet only 32% of fourth-graders were judged proficient or better in the 2000 NAEP reading assessment. Similarly, American fourth-graders were third in the world on the TIMSS science test, but only 13% were judged proficient or better on the 1996 NAEP science assessment.

The NCLB requirements for “highly qualified” teachers add still more impossible-to-meet specifications that will hurt most those districts most in need. A recent study showed that, while California’s class-size initiative helped schools overall, it hurt students in some impoverished urban areas. The mandate opened up many teaching positions in the suburbs, while places like Los Angeles hemorrhaged good teachers. More people had to be given “emergency” certification.⁴⁴

NCLB forbids schools from hiring people with emergency credentials. By the school year 2005-06, all current teachers must be highly qualified, as must anyone hired after the first day of the 2002-03 school year. By “highly qualified,” NCLB means those who hold at least a bachelor’s degree, have full state certification (or have passed the state’s licensing exam), and who have not had any certification requirements waived on “an emergency, provisional, or temporary

basis.”

Where will our cities find such highly qualified teachers? As NCLB raises teacher standards, states are busy cutting their budgets. And the law of supply and demand still holds, to the detriment of impoverished city schools.

The *ESEA Implementation Guide*, a tome written by former *Education Week* reporter Julie Miller, is useful for understanding the implications and ramifications of the act. Information about it can be found at www.titlei.com/subscribe1.htm (note: if you type a “1” instead of an “i” in “titlei,” the program converts the “1” to an “i”).

VOUCHERS

Many commentators, including me, pronounced vouchers dead after their resounding defeat in referenda in California and Michigan in the 2000 elections. They got new life when the Supreme Court ruled (by a 5-4 margin) that the Cleveland voucher program is constitutional, even though 96.6% of the children attend church-affiliated schools in which religious instruction is a priority.

The vouchers, worth \$1,875 to \$2,250 depending on family income, may be used at any religious or secular private school in Cleveland or at any public school in the districts surrounding Cleveland (in which case the voucher is always \$2,250, but the district receives additional state funding as well). No schools in the surrounding districts chose to participate.

The Court majority noted that Ohio had created magnet schools and charter schools and that Cleveland itself had a tutoring program. The voucher program also permitted all religious and nonreligious schools in Cleveland to participate, so the program did not, Chief Justice Rehnquist reasoned, tilt toward religious schools.

Dissenters noted that almost all the voucher money flowed to religious schools and that these schools could use that money for any purpose they chose. The *New York Times*, in an editorial opposing the ruling, observed:

Once students enroll in those schools, they are subjected to just the sort of religious training the First Amendment forbids the state to underwrite. In many cases, students are required to attend Mass or other religious services. Tax dollars go to buy Bibles, prayer books, crucifixes, and other religious iconography.

It is hard to think of a starker assault on the doctrine of separation of church and state than taking taxpayer dollars and using them to inculcate specific religious beliefs in young people.⁴⁵

Such inculcation is part of the mission of the Catholic schools, and two-thirds of the families sending their children to Cleveland’s Catholic schools were not Catholic.

In dissent, Justice Breyer emphasized the risk of “religiously based social conflict.” Justice Stevens seconded Justice Breyer and wrote, “Whenever we remove a brick from the wall that was designed to separate religion and government, we increase the risk of religious strife and weaken the foundations of our democracy.” The relevance of this concern could be seen in statements by the Rev. Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson that “pagans, abortionists, feminists, gays and lesbians, the ACLU, and People for the American Way” were somehow responsible for the September 11 attacks. In an op-ed published before the ruling, David Berliner pointed out that “the proud message of 9/11, proclaimed throughout the world, was: ‘United we stand.’ The other, unspoken half of that is: ‘Divided we fall.’”⁴⁶

So how important was the Court’s decision? Advocates for vouchers claimed it was huge. George Will wrote, “Happily, yesterday, socially disadvantaged children had their best day in court since *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954.”⁴⁷ President Bush said it was “just as historic,” and Secretary of Education Paige also made the connection to *Brown*. Clint Bolick, who argued the Cleveland case before the Court, acknowledged that all these references to *Brown* were no accident. “We wanted to make sure this was seen not as a case about religion, but about education,” said Bolick. “If the Court perceived it as a religion case, then we would be in serious trouble. If they saw it as an education case, then we would win.”⁴⁸ The link to *Brown* was denounced by Julian Bond of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) and Theodore Shaw of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund.

Milton Friedman thought that the next step should be to raise the value of the vouchers to something near the per-pupil expenditure of the public schools. Then, he argued in a *New York Times* op-ed, “school vouchers can push elementary and secondary schools out of the 19th century and into the 21st by introducing market competition on a broad scale, just as competition

has made progress possible in every other area of economic and civic life.”⁴⁹ The *New York Times* published a spate of letters reacting to Friedman’s op-ed — all of them opposed. Writers asked how depriving public schools of funds would lead them to improve and predicted that school entrepreneurs would cook the books on student achievement just as others with financial interests had done with Enron, WorldCom, and the rest. Dennis Buss of Rider University wrote, “Free marketeers like Mr. Friedman may delight in the prospect of competition working ‘its magic.’ But the Supreme Court’s benighted decision on vouchers actually poses a threat to the shared civic values and democratic social cohesiveness that American public schools advance.”⁵⁰

Aside from those with ideological or economic perspectives on the outcomes, most people felt that, although the future was not clear, the decision would have little impact. Frank Kemerer of the University of North Texas observed that many state constitutions had much more restrictive separation clauses than the U.S. Constitution. However, he also noted that some states had declared that their clauses *meant* the same thing as the First Amendment, no matter what specific words the state constitution used.⁵¹ (This kind of logic might cause some people to think of Humpty Dumpty.) Indeed, just over a month after the decision, a state judge found the Florida state constitution “clear and unambiguous” in prohibiting public money from being spent on church schools or any sectarian institution and declared Florida’s voucher program unconstitutional.⁵² Florida Gov. Jeb Bush immediately appealed the decision.

Clive Belfield and Henry Levin provided eight reasons why they think vouchers will have limited impact. For one thing, no education reform has much impact because children spend 90% of their lives before age 18 outside of school. Moreover, even in places where voucher programs exist, they are undersubscribed. In Milwaukee, only about 60% of the vouchers are claimed. In Dayton, New York, and Washington, D.C., 20% to 35% of parents who actually receive vouchers don’t use them.⁵³

Belfield and Levin observe that “private schools themselves are not that enthusiastic about vouchers.” Increased enrollments do not lead to economies of scale. More important, private schools fear that government money will be accompanied by government regulation and oversight. This might be all the more true now, since schools that accept vouchers will be sub-

ject to the AYP provisions of NCLB. Former Assistant Secretary of Education Finn wrote, “In the chorus of commentary, one set of singers was notably muted: those who lead and speak for U.S. private schools. . . . There was practically no suggestion that U.S. private educators are ready to press for more vouchers so that their schools can serve more disadvantaged children.” Finn then ran through a list of explanations similar to those offered by Belfield and Levin.⁵⁴

Belfield and Levin think parents will be more attracted by home schooling than by vouchers. Both they and Kemerer suggest that another innovation has the potential to have the greatest impact: tuition tax credits.

TUITION TAX CREDITS

President Bush’s budget proposal for fiscal year 2003 contains \$3.7 billion for tuition tax credits. Six states now have them. Indeed, tax credits may be the coming thing in privatization, so it’s important to see how, or if, they work.

In its Wild West approach to charter schools, Arizona lived up to its reputation as a rogue nation. It has now outdone itself with respect to tuition tax credits. In Arizona, a single person can contribute up to \$500 a year to an STO (school tuition organization), a couple can contribute up to \$625, and both will get a dollar-for-dollar matching credit on Arizona state taxes. Another \$250 can be contributed for public schools, but these funds can be used only for extracurricular activities.

STOs look like stealth organizations. Georgeanna Meyer of the Arizona Department of Revenue said, “STOs don’t answer to anyone. They don’t have to report their presence. They don’t have to report their receipts. They don’t have to tell anyone how they spend their money.”⁵⁵ Unless an STO reveals itself publicly, the state has no way of knowing that it exists. Thus it has no way to know if someone who *claims* the tax credit actually donated any money.

The author of the legislation touted the plan as a way “to send kids to private school who otherwise couldn’t afford to go.” So does the program benefit poor families? Mostly not.

Through 2000, the program had cost Arizona \$74.3 million in revenue. Over \$33 million has gone to private schools; the other \$41 million has gone to public schools. If one assumes revenue loss in 2001 was the same as in 2000 (a very conservative assumption),

then the cost so far is \$109.4 million.

Glen Wilson of Arizona State University analyzed where the money has gone. Wilson first outlined the barriers facing poor families who want to send their children to private schools:

1. Tuition. In 2000-01, tuition at Arizona private schools averaged \$4,000 (median \$3,200) for elementary schools and \$6,700 (median \$5,900) for high schools. With the credits worth a maximum of \$675, they don't give much aid to poor families. The per-capita award in 2000 covered only 27% of tuition at elementary schools, 19% at middle schools, and 15% at high schools.

2. Private school costs not included in tuition charges — book fees, supplies, uniforms, and extracurricular activities.

3. Selectivity. Private schools are not open-door institutions, something that works against children living in poverty.

4. The families might be of the “wrong” religion. The statute forbids schools from discriminating on the basis of race, color, handicap, familial status, or national origin, but not religion. “Many STOs distribute scholarships only to schools affiliated with specific religions or religious beliefs.”

5. Transportation. Most private schools don't provide it. Many poor working families don't have the flexible schedules they would need to do it on their own, and even if they do, it's another cost, hence another barrier.⁵⁶

With such hurdles to jump, it is no surprise to find that approximately 76 cents of every tuition-tax-credit dollar went to students who were already attending private schools. Analysis of income found that in 1998 credit claimants with a federal adjusted gross income (FAGI) of under \$50,000 claimed only 19% of the credits, worth 16% of the money. Those with an FAGI of more than \$50,000 claimed the rest: 81% of the credits, worth 84% of the money. Keep in mind that filers with an FAGI higher than \$50,000 often have substantial deductions from mortgages and property taxes.

Looking at the public extracurricular tax credit, Wilson found that over half of the money went to the wealthiest 25% of schools and another 25% went to the second wealthiest quartile. Little wonder, then, that Wilson concludes, “Arizona's private school tuition tax credit program is expensive and does little to help poor students.” He recommends abolishing the credit, but since that isn't likely, he calls for a means

test for eligibility as a method to improve both efficiency and equity.

IMPOVERISHED SCHOOLS

Before NCLB, a lot of people were saying that an appropriate — and less intrusive — role for the federal government would simply be to fully fund its share of special education, which it has never done, and to appropriate money to repair America's dilapidated schools. The feds promised to cover 40% of special education costs, but they currently pony up only 17%.

California, and probably all other states, would have appreciated federal money in both areas. The American Civil Liberties Union filed a class-action suit on behalf of a number of poor districts located throughout California. Claire Cooper of the *Sacramento Bee* reported that depositions in the case contained “snapshots of filth, chaos, and desperation,” such as these:

- Young children picking up beer bottles, condoms, and bullets on school grounds. The students are taken out of reading instruction and assigned to this “beautification” work in rotating shifts.

- Special education students assigned to no teacher and roaming the halls.

- Rats in cafeterias, one carrying fruit in its mouth, others scurrying around a bread rack.

- Chemistry labs with no chemicals.

- Literature classes without books.

- Computer classes in which, according to one student, “We sit there and talk about what we would be doing if we had computers.”⁵⁷

The trial judge has stayed the suit and sent it to arbitration with another judge acting as arbiter. If no solution can be found that satisfies the plaintiffs, they expect to continue the suit next year.

Seven *Bee* reporters visited all 52 high schools in the Sacramento area and reported back conditions and disparities similar to the statewide ones noted in the suit. “In some schools, students have as many as six language courses to choose from. They swim in sparkling pools, walk hallways with skylights, use restrooms as clean as Nordstrom's. On other campuses . . . teenagers are offered only one or two language options, Spanish and maybe French. They have no pools, walk hallways of gray concrete, and put up with restrooms reeking of urine.”⁵⁸ Some high schools had only nine sports — five for boys, four for girls — while others had 15 for each gender.

While some disparities seemed to exhibit “no rhyme

or reason,” most fell along the usual lines of race and socioeconomic status. The 20 schools with the highest levels of poverty had 127 teachers with emergency credentials; the 20 with the lowest levels had just 62. At one wealthy school, the *Bee* found eight science teachers with eight science labs; at a poor school, 13 science teachers were making do with just five labs. One physical science teacher called himself “the nomad” because he pushed a cart of supplies from room to room.

In some instances, money seemed wasted by mismanagement and questionable purchasing practices, but more often a lack of funds had to do with status: “Newer communities tend to have growing enrollments that trigger construction dollars from the state for new schools, as well as developer fees and local bond issues.”

The article didn’t report on parental contributions, but they probably occur in California just as they were shown to do recently in Maryland. There, parents in an affluent neighborhood of Montgomery County became concerned over the renovations the county planned for their elementary school. To ensure that the remodeling was done right, 40 families kicked in a total of \$200,000. “Done right” meant that the school’s appearance would be in line with the upscale community.⁵⁹

The Education Trust jumped into the discussion of high-poverty, high-performing schools with *Dispelling the Myth*, its analysis of “High-Flying Schools,” which it also sometimes refers to as “Great Schools.”⁶⁰ The Education Trust claimed to have found 4,577 such schools nationwide. There were 3,592 high-performing, high-poverty schools; 2,305 high-performing, high-minority schools; and 1,320 high-performing schools that had high proportions of both poor and minority students.

If one looks closely at the criteria for “high-flying” schools, one comes away thinking that such “high flying” is equal parts hyperbole and hokum. As defined by the Education Trust, high-flying schools are those that score in the upper third of the state on the state’s testing program in reading or math. They also have either 50% or more minority students or 50% or more students living in poverty or both. (Poverty is defined by eligibility for participation in subsidized lunch programs.)

What the report doesn’t emphasize is that the school qualifies if it meets that criterion for *any one year* at *any one grade* and for *any one subject*. The Education

Trust has put a database on its website (www.edtrust.org) that permits you to examine any state using criteria of your choice. In some states, you must analyze the data subject by subject and grade by grade, while in others there are results as well for “elementary.”

California is a large and diverse state that uses the Stanford Achievement Test (SAT 9) as its major test. The Education Trust produced a separate report for California,⁶¹ so let’s look at that state. The Education Trust finds 355 high-performing schools with high poverty, 300 with high-minority enrollment, and 143 with both. There are 8,761 schools in California, so the last figure represents 1.6% of all schools.

Varying the criteria produces dramatic changes in this list. For instance, using third-grade reading scores to identify schools, setting the achievement criterion to “upper 25%,” and selecting the poverty and minority (African American and Latino) enrollment criteria as 50% each (the same as are used by the Education Trust) reduces the list from 143 to 20. Raising the poverty level and minority enrollment to 75% leaves us just one California school that qualifies.

But there’s more. Using the Education Trust’s achievement criterion of upper third in the state, 655 California schools qualify using either a 50% poverty or 50% minority criterion, but not both: 301 of those 655 schools qualify in only one grade; 212 of the 301 schools that qualify in only one grade qualify in only one subject, math; and 51 of the 212 schools that qualify in math qualify only in third grade, the first grade tested.

Stephen Krashen of the University of Southern California observed that the Education Trust’s 50% poverty criterion was low — the average for all of California is 46%. Krashen also noted that, in one school he examined, it was advantaged students who carried the school’s average to “high-flying” status while the poor children continued to score low.⁶² (Perhaps the lone good aspect of NCLB is that it requires this kind of disaggregation.)

In addition, California is among the lowest-scoring states — higher than only Alabama, Louisiana, and Hawaii — in the 1998 NAEP reading assessment. The Education Trust’s definition of high-flying is relative — the top third in each state. Many high-flying schools in California would lose that designation if compared to schools in, say, Virginia, an average-scoring state on NAEP, or Iowa, a high-scoring state.

Krashen also indicated that some of the high-poverty schools in the Education Trust list were not actual-

ly high-poverty schools in the figures they had reported to the state. He questioned the proportion of students tested in some of these schools.

TABLE 1.
Poverty Levels and High-Flying Schools

Poverty Level Greater Than	Number of High-Flying Schools	Number of High-Flying Schools Two Years In a Row
1%	1,232	1,162
5%	1,011	948
10%	775	712
25%	324	264
50%	74	40
75%	9	5
90%	3	0

In fact, the Education Trust data, far from “dispelling the myth,” reveal just how hard it is to rise above poverty. Consider the data in Table 1.

In this table, the only thing that varies independently is the poverty level. (Minority enrollment is for any percentage of nonwhites from zero to 100.) The achievement criterion is the upper quarter in the state on the third-grade reading test. If we look for schools that have at least 1% poverty or more (the database doesn’t permit poverty to be set at zero), we find 1,232 schools. A search for high-flyers with at least 50% of the students in poverty uncovers only 74 schools, and only 40 of those schools were identified as high-flyers two years in a row.

The schools the Education Trust calls “high flying” are overwhelmingly elementary schools (in which, of course, it is easier to teach to a test). Few secondary schools attain high-flying status. Searching on ninth-grade reading — using criteria of 50% minority and 50% poverty — turns up only four schools. One of them is a model school at the University of California, San Diego, with grades 6 through 9 and 150 students. It contains 24% African American students, 52% Latino, 11% Asian, and 13% white. One is a grade 9-12 medical magnet high school with 1,700 students — 6% African American, 48% Latino, 27% Asian, and 18% white. A third school is an urban magnet with grades 9-12. The fourth is a rural school with 104 students in grades 9-12, 59% Latino, 40% white, and 1% Asian. None of the four is a typical poor ur-

ban high school.

Lowering the poverty criterion to 25% adds just three more schools. One is a 9-12 high school with a student population that is 3% African American, 51% Latino, 9% Asian, 1% Native American, and 36% white. One is the Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies with 1,543 students in grades 6 through 12 — 46% African American, 12% Latino, 13% Asian, and 29% white. The third is the San Diego School of Creative and Performing Arts, with a population that is 32% African American, 18% Latino, 10% Asian, 1% Native American, and 39% white.

Dale Johnson and Bonnie Johnson, education professors at Dowling College on Long Island, went back to the classroom for a year, teaching in a poor rural school in Louisiana. Their school had “no library, no

The John Ashcroft Will Hate This Award goes to the American Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts and to Leslie Edinson.



When officials at the Massachusetts Department of Education learned that Alfie Kohn would address a conference with a speech titled “The Case Against Standardized Testing,” they threatened to yank the conference’s funding, even though Kohn was not to be paid out of state funds. Kohn was paid *not* to speak. The ACLU filed suit, calling the state department’s action a violation of Kohn’s First Amendment rights and seeking an injunction to keep the department from making similar threats in the future. Depositions in the case strongly imply that the decision to dis-invite Kohn started in the office of then Gov. Paul Celluci.

Kohn has said of the matter, “The same undemocratic sensibility that imposes high-stakes testing also acts to suppress dissenting views. It’s a small step from saying, ‘Pass this test or you don’t graduate,’ to ‘Drop that speaker or you don’t get your funding.’”

Michael Albert, ACLU cooperating attorney, declared, “It’s especially troubling that public education officials seem not to understand the Constitution that they are supposed teach kids about.”

Leslie Edinson, a principal in Springfield, was to be a part of a panel that replaced Kohn. When he found out what had happened, he read a statement of protest and walked out.

playground equipment, no hot water for washing hands, no art teachers, no counselor, and one toilet for 72 faculty and staff. We began our year with no maps, one globe, a shortage of textbooks, dictionaries from 1952, malfunctioning heating/cooling systems, and a healthy supply of cockroaches and other pests.” The students the Johnsons taught had no trouble sounding out a word like “waitress” but had no idea what it meant — they had not been to restaurants that use them.

The Johnsons think that if the state is going to require these students to pass the same test as students in affluent districts, it ought to do more than just threaten to close the school — which is all it has done.⁶³

In the past, Chester Finn and others have accused those of us who point to poverty as a reason for low achievement of believing that “demography is destiny.” Not true. But it is true that whatever can go wrong in a child’s life is greatly exacerbated by poverty. Poverty is a condition like gravity: gravity affects everything we do. Overcoming gravity requires powerful engines. So does overcoming poverty.

DISPATCHES FROM ALL OVER

We close this year with a few notes from abroad. An e-mail arrived in late October from Arthur Hu, a computer engineer in Washington. It was headlined “Chinese Are Even Dumber Than Americans in Science.” Hu’s headline was followed by a story from the *Los Angeles Times* about a nationwide survey in China that found only 1.4% of the inhabitants can demonstrate “basic scientific literacy.”⁶⁴ On a 90-question test, Chinese adults couldn’t say whether plants produce oxygen, whether the Earth’s core is hot, or whether the Earth revolves about the sun. Only 0.04% of agricultural workers showed basic literacy, while 3.1% of city dwellers did. “Science is very important to a nation’s development,” said one person interviewed in Beijing, “but it doesn’t have much to do with me.”

In England, Home Secretary David Blunkett urged preventive testing in the United Kingdom. “Instead of trying to pick up the pieces when things go wrong, it makes a lot more sense to invest resources in prevention,” he maintained.⁶⁵ Well said. Unfortunately, Blunkett’s dreadful idea is to examine children at age 3 for behavior that would predict later gang membership and criminal activity. Apparently this, Blunkett’s first major speech on the job, caused no reaction. As far as I know, there were not even headlines

referring to him as David Blockhead.

While American students are sweating under ever larger numbers of mandated tests, French elementary students get to enjoy *La Semaine de Goût* — the Week of Taste. But it’s not all fun. The anatomy of the tongue goes up on every French chalkboard, and teachers explain what messages it sends to the brain and how. But the students also get to troop through fresh markets and taste special menus from Michelin-starred restaurateurs. “Three thousand chefs go from classroom to classroom throughout the country, whipping up regional specialties from cassoulet to bouillabaisse.”⁶⁶ At one day-care center, children dined on cream of pumpkin soup, baby lamb, new potatoes, and *crème fraîche* on strawberries. At an elementary school, children worked with Jean-François Girardin, head chef at the Ritz Hotel in Paris, to make a zabaglione sauce, which they then consumed on brochettes of exotic fruits.

Sommeliers instruct children on the shape, color, and tastes of different grape varietals, although they are not permitted to actually talk about wine. A survey in one classroom suggested that most children had tasted it, though. “Yuck,” was the consensus opinion. Phillippe Faure-Brac, the sommelier/teacher and owner of the Bistro du Sommelier in Paris, said that it takes a while for children to develop a taste for wine.

What profit it a child to pass the MCAS, FCAT, TAKS or CASE, if he lose his Epicurean aesthetic?

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