

# THE ROTTEN APPLES IN EDUCATION AWARDS 2005

Gerald W. Bracey

Gerald W. Bracey is an independent researcher and writer living in Alexandria, VA. His latest book, *Reading Educational Research: How to Avoid Getting Statistically Snookered*, will appear from Heinemann February 16, 2006.

The Rotten Apple Awards used to be part of the annual “Bracey Report on the Condition of Public Education” (so named by the editors of *Phi Delta Kappan* where it has appeared each October since 1991). They were the counterweight to the Golden Apple Awards which remain part of the report. In 2000, the Board of Directors of Phi Delta Kappa decided that the ridicule dispensed in the Rotten Apples was not appropriate to their house organ. That they decided this shortly after one recipient (Willard Daggett) threatened to sue is no doubt coincidental. Just as well. The Rotten Apples have grown and, alas, this year are the same length as the Bracey Report itself. Make of that what you will.

Comments on the awards are invited. [gbracey1@verizon.net](mailto:gbracey1@verizon.net).

## **THE “JIMMY CARTER AMPHIBIOUS KILLER RABBIT” AWARD: MARGARET SPELLINGS, SECRETARY OF EDUCATION**

Where to start? Margaret Spellings said so *many* silly things in less than a year. “What has that course been so far? Rock-steady. And I intend to build on it.” Block that metaphor! as *The New Yorker* might say. That from an April speech on the new “flexibility” she would bring to NCLB (read: backroom, behind closed-door deals). Her speech to the PTA in June borders on word salad. Or consider this May Day astrological account of the birth of Christ, er, No Child Left Behind:

Three years ago, the stars aligned: The American people decided it was finally time to reform our public schools. Parents demanded accountability, taxpayers demanded value, businesses needed better-educated employees and children stuck in poor performing schools needed change. The message was heard at the highest levels of government. And the No Child Left Behind law was born.

NCLB: Wow. The American people decided. Grassroots, bottom-up democracy at its best.

I refrain from comments on the insemination process and NCLB’s arrival with fully formed sexuality so it could start screwing people immediately.

When Connecticut threatened a lawsuit against NCLB, spellings told PBS’ “News Hour with Jim Lehrer” that Connecticut was “un-American” and practiced “the soft bigotry of low expectations.” That elicited a three-page letter of rebuke from Betty Sternberg, Connecticut’s Commissioner of Education. The letter said, in part, “On a very personal note, I must tell you that as a Jewish American whose family was deeply affected by the pogroms of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and later by the Holocaust, bigotry is never “soft.” Bigotry always has a hard edge. It is simply outrageous that you would accuse me and my associates of the ‘soft bigotry of low expectations’...Not since the last episode of the Secretary of Education’s words about terrorist organizations have we been confronted by such name calling. I have higher expectations of the Secretary of Education and would suggest that, at a minimum, an apology is in order.”

In a *Hartford Courant* commentary piece, Spellings managed to insult all teachers. Tests are essential she said, because “Teachers cannot remedy weaknesses they don’t see.” As if standardized test scores were the only tool teachers could use diagnose children’s problems.

But being Margaret Spellings means never having to say you’re sorry.

While Spellings’ declarations provide an unending affirmation of her deservedness for a putrescent fruit, we present the award for her chronologically first faux pas, a gaffe that

proved her unfit to be secretary of education (but, hey, after Cavazos, Paige, Alexander and Bennett, who has expectations?).

Spellings had not been on the job 48 hours, hadn't been confirmed yet, when she dashed off to protect American children from....a bunny rabbit.

Buster, by name. To all but Spellings, Buster is not like the amphibious killer rabbit that attacked Jimmy Carter in 1979. The most common adjective applied to Buster is "sweet."

Buster stars in "Postcards from Buster," part of a PBS early-learning series, Ready-to-Learn, to introduce American preschool children to a variety of lifestyles. At the time Spellings whacked Buster, he had already visited Mormon, Muslim and evangelical Christian families. He had been seen clogging, rodeo barrel racing, monoskiing, and grooving to the Arapahoe Grass Dance.

In "Sugartime!" Buster was to visit Vermont and learn how people harvest maple syrup and make cheese. But, alas, PBS did not choose some Norman Rockwell-wholesome family like those of Vermonters Bill Mathis\* or Susan Ohanian\* for the instruction. It chose two families with a total of six children, the children in each family being raised by two women. Uh-oh.

Spellings zapped PBS with a letter more than suggesting the segment not air because Ready-to-Learn is "to use the television medium to help prepare preschool age children for school. The television programs that must fulfill this mission are to be specifically designed for this purpose, with the highest attention to production quality and validity of research-based educational objectives, content and materials. We believe the 'Sugartime!' episode does not come within these purposes or within the intent of Congress...."

Spellings' letter bemused *Washington Post* television columnist, Lisa de Moraes: "Why, you might wonder, given that preschoolers who watch the episode learn how maple syrup and cheese are made, not to mention useful English-language phrases wouldn't the program fit Congress's intent and the goals of the program?" (One additional Ready-to-Learn goal is to develop language proficiency in children who do not speak English as a first language).

Commentators observed that the mothers stayed very much in the background, that the program focused on making syrup and cheese, and that it never used the words "gay" or "lesbian."

Spellings' letter also said "Many parents would not want their young children exposed to the life-styles portrayed in this episode." She then exhibited the vindictive nastiness so prevalent in the Bush administration: She disinvited Buster's executive producer, Carol Greenwald, from speaking at a conference on children's TV and demanded that money spent on the "Sugartime!" episode be returned.

In *Weekly World Newspaper Online*, Deb Wilmer opined that Spellings must not have read the Department's Request for Proposals: "Diversity will be incorporated into the fabric of the series to help children understand and respect differences and learn to live in a multicultural society. The series will avoid stereotypical images of all kinds and show modern multi-ethnic/lingual/cultural families and children." Wilmer cited the 2000 census showing that over 2 million children under the age of 18 live in households with same sex partners.

The *Boston Globe* called Spellings' harassment "one of the emptiest cultural attacks we've seen in a period that's been filled to bursting with hot air" and lamented that it was consistent with her support of anti-gays in the "SpongeBob Square Pants" flap. Charles Haynes at the First Amendment Center said Spellings' letter violated the spirit, and quite possibly the letter, of the First Amendment.

Independent of any Constitutional concerns, *Reno Gazette-Journal* columnist, Siobhan McAndrew listed 16 things that children could have seen on TV the week of "Sugartime!" The list included a fatal train wreck caused by a suicidal man who parked his SUV on a track; the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz; orphaned children in Southeast Asia; a pretrial hearing for Michael Jackson; victims of sexually abusive priests; a father charged with stabbing his 7-year-old daughter to death at school; and an American hostage pleading for his life in Iraq.

For me, *New York Times*' reporter Julie Salamon shone the clearest light on the uses of Buster.

Salamon asked Emma Riesner, 11, who was to star in the ill-fated segment what she thought of the cancellation. "I was pretty upset...I know some people don't like gays and lesbians because they think they are bad people. That's just a stereotype and it's kind of hurtful. I don't think people should think of us as different. We are just the same except we have two moms."

Salamon also asked 12-year-old Farah Siddique what she thought about PBS' decision to bump Buster. "We don't believe in that stuff. My opinion is that it is bad or wrong. My sister is 7, and she watches PBS kid shows. I wouldn't want her to watch that kind of thing."

About her own star turn with Buster as a member of a Muslim family, Farah said it made her feel less "marginalized." "It was important to tell people about my religion and everything. Some people think we're bad because of 9/11 or something, and I'm telling them we are not bad, we're not trying to hurt anyone or do anything wrong."

And what if, Salamon then wondered, people said they didn't want to watch her segment with Buster because they didn't like Muslims?

“Wow, I hadn’t thought about it like that. Can I change what I said? If people were judging me because of my religion I would get really sad. Now I think maybe they should show it.”

To de Moraes, Spellings’ assault on Buster brought to mind the Rogers and Hammerstein lyrics from “South Pacific:”

You’ve got to be taught to hate and fear,  
You’ve got to be taught from year to year,  
It’s got to be drummed in your dear little ear,  
You’ve got to be carefully taught...  
You’ve got to be taught before it’s too late,  
Before your are six or seven or eight,  
To hate all the people your relatives [and the Secretary of Education and President] hate  
You’ve got to be carefully taught,  
You’ve got to be carefully taught.

\*Bill Mathis is Superintendent of Rutland, VT schools; Susan Ohanian is an independent education writer and consultant in Charlotte, VT.

Margaret Spellings. 2005. “‘Growing Pains’ Won’t Sidetrack No Child Left Behind.” *USA Today*, May 1.

Margaret Spellings. 2005. “Testing Serves Students.” *Hartford Courant*, March 20.

Betty Sternberg. 2005. Letter to Margaret Spellings, April 11.

Michele Jacklin. 2005. “Spellings Should Cool the Insults, Check the Results.” *Hartford Courant*, April 27.

Robert Frahm. 2005. “No Apologies at ‘No Child’ Meeting.” *Hartford Courant*, April 19.

Julie Salamon. 2005. “A Child Learns a Harsh Lesson in Politics.” *New York Times*, February 5.

Lisa de Moraes. 2005. “PBS’s ‘Buster’ Gets an Education.” *Washington Post* January 27.

Lisa de Moraes. 2005. “Who Framed Buster Rabbit? The Fallout Continues.” *Washington Post*, February 18.

Charles C. Haynes. 2005. “Buster Bunny Meets Two Mommies: Who Counts as ‘Family?’” First Amendment Center.

[www.firstamendmentcenter.org/commentary.aspx?id=14810](http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/commentary.aspx?id=14810)

Deb Wilmer. 2005. "Is Buster the Rabbit Bad for Kids?" *People's Weekly World Newspaper Online*. [www.pww.org/article/articleprint/6477](http://www.pww.org/article/articleprint/6477).

Matthew Gilbert. 2005. "Sweet 'Buster' Is Far from Radical." *Boston Globe*, January 29.

Siobhan McAndrew. 2005. "Protecting Kids from a Bunny Named Buster." *Reno Gazette-Journal*, January 29<sup>th</sup>.

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### **THE "THIS TURNTABLE FOR HIRE" AWARD: ARMSTRONG WILLIAMS AND THE U. S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION.**

The year was not yet a week old, the Rotten Apples of 2004 had been posted only two days prior, Spellings was not yet on board when the aroma of putrescent Granny Smith's wafted out from the U. S. Department of Education. As part of a \$1,000,000 scheme, labeled "covert propaganda" by the GAO (meaning: it's illegal), the Department had paid conservative pundit, Armstrong Williams, \$240,000 to hype No Child Left Behind. Williams managed several on-camera interviews with then-Secretary of Education Rod Paige, apparently because he was buddies with the host of the show. But he didn't tell anyone that Paige's appearances were part of a...bribe. In the 1950's, DeeJays took money from record producers to play certain songs. It was called payola then. The term fits here.

Ironically, Greg Toppo at *USA Today* broke the story. "Ironically" because as part of the \$1,000,000, a PR firm rated stories and reporters on how favorably they covered NCLB. Toppo finished "last," garnering a mere 2 points. Williams defended his taking the money saying that he supported NCLB, thus marking himself as stupid as well as venal.

The day after Toppo's story, the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* ran front page elaborations and both papers kicked in with editorials. The "Meet the Press" gang kicked it around and Byron York of the *National Review* closed the show with, "You know, No Child Left Behind—a lot of conservatives hated it and a lot of Democrats hated it. The only way you could get somebody to say something nice about it is to pay them \$240,000." [Note: You could pay me \$240,000 and I *still* wouldn't say anything nice about it].

On Fox, Tony Snow, Linda Chavez and David Corn excoriated Williams and the Department but it wasn't clear if Chavez was upset about the stupidity of it all or her own folly—she had touted Bush policies for free. She was definitely upset that Williams' actions would provide ammunition for those who dismiss minority conservatives as race sellouts. As if to confirm Chavez' worst fears, Williams told Corn in conversation that "This happens all the time. There are others." Then, said Corn, he clammed up.

The White House denied that it had any knowledge of the contract. Investigations by the *Los Angeles Times* proved otherwise. While working as White House special assistant for domestic policy, David Dunn had known about it. At the time the story broke, Dunn had moved in as Spellings' chief of staff at USDE so the White House might have engaged in some parsing and sophistry here about who was in the White House when and who knew what when (this White House? Really?).

The Department of Education called its Inspector General to investigate and George Miller (D-CA) accused to the White House of impeding the investigation by putting some officials "off limits" for interviews.

Rumor had it that Spellings would redact parts of the IG's report invoking an obscure executive privilege act (possibly called to her attention by Bush who seems to have much expertise in that area), but it appeared intact, finding that "the Department [of Education] paid for work that most likely did not reach its intended audience and paid for deliverables that were never received. The advertisements that were produced appear to be of poor quality, and the Department has no assurance the ads received the airtime for which it paid."

One ad was simply a public service announcement by then Secretary Paige meaning that "the department appears to have paid for something it had already substantially produced itself." In addition, "the radio advertisement that was produced appears to be the audio track from the television ad. Ads identified as deliverables were never completed... Full ad production costs were billed and paid by the Department, even though the Department only received two of the eight ads it was supposed to receive... There was no documentation to indicate activity reports were reviewed and evaluated to compare required versus actual performance."

The IG pronounced the contract stupid and ill-handled. The Government Accountability Office pronounced it illegal as well. The *New York Times* spoke for many other media outlets: "In its purchase of self-aggrandizing agitprop, the administration plainly violated the law against spreading 'covert propaganda' at public expense, according to the report of the Government Accountability Office. More than that, Bush officials forged a cheesy new low in Washington politicians' endless bazaar of peddling public relations initiatives at taxpayers' expense."

The GAO observed that Williams' 12 monthly reports listed 168 activities other than ads promoting NCLB. The GAO could document only 1. The Department weaseled saying that the only things that had legal significance in the contracts were the lists of "deliverables." The GAO cited a number of legal decisions that refuted the Department's position.

In a letter reporting its findings to Senators Kennedy and Lautenberg, the GAO declared, "we find that the Department contracted for Armstrong Williams to comment regularly on the No Child Left Behind Act without assuring that the Department's role was

disclosed to the targeted audiences. This violated the publicity or propaganda prohibition because it amounted to covert propaganda.”

All this led syndicated columnist, Michelle Malkin to note that Tribune Media Services had dropped Williams’ syndicated column. “Now,” she harrumphed, “it’s time for someone in the Bush administration to suffer the consequences.”

Oh, Michelle, get *serious*. Bush’s life is a stunning list of personal failures which Daddy and Daddy’s buddies have covered, preventing Dubya from being ever being held accountable for *anything*. And that’s how Dubya now treats his buddies. Expect Williams to receive soon the “George Tenet Slam Dunk” Medal of Freedom. Or the “Brownie Doin’ a Heck of a Job” award.

A curious aspect of this story was the outrage it evoked in the black and gay communities. “Gay Black Republican Paid \$240,000 to Lie to Blacks,” was the headline at The Brown Watch: News for People of Color. This was not an “outing.” In 1998, *New York Magazine* pointed to the irony of Williams interviewing Trent Lott on the sin of homosexuality when Williams himself had just been hit with a 50-count suit for sexual harassment by one of his former male employees (settled out of court, apparently).

On the net, Alicia Banks, identified as a “radio producer, talk show host, DJ, columnist” and self-described as lesbian, began an essay “It’s a fact of life: most gaybashers are gay. Just as I noted, Armstrong Williams, neocon in blackface, radio host, and renown [sic] house nigger, is a homosexual.” She wrapped up with, “To Armstrong: You have been exposed as the whore I have always known you are.”

In mid-October, Lautenberg’s office announced that the Justice Department was investigating the affair and that criminal charges were possible. Nothing appears to have happened since.

Greg Toppo. 2005. “Education Department Paid Commentator to Promote Law.” *USA Today*, January 17.

Greg Toppo. 2005. “Senator: Charges Possible Over Williams Contract.” *USA Today*, October 17.

Editor and Publisher, “‘Meet the Press’ Gang Kicks Around Armstrong Williams Debacle.” January 9, 2005.

[www.editorandpublisher.com/eandp/news/article\\_display.jsp?vnu\\_content\\_id=1000749558](http://www.editorandpublisher.com/eandp/news/article_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1000749558).

Deborah Mitchell and Beth Landman. 1998. “A Lott of Irony for Trent Interviewer.” *New York Magazine*, June 29-July 6.

[www.newyorkmetro.com/nymetro/news/people/columns/intelligencer/2902](http://www.newyorkmetro.com/nymetro/news/people/columns/intelligencer/2902).

Government Accountability Office. Letter to Senators Lautenberg and Kennedy, September 30, 2005.

Tom Hamburger and Peter Wallsten. 2005. "Inquiry Finds White House Role in Contract." *Los Angeles Times*, April 16, p. A14.

U. S. Department of Education, Inspector General. 2005. *Review of Formation Issues Regarding the Department of Education's Fiscal Year 2003 Contract with Ketchum, Inc. for Media Relations Services.*

Robert Pear, 2005. "Buying of News by Bush's Aides is Ruled Illegal." *New York Times*, October 1.

*New York Times* (Editorial). 2005. "Faux News is Bad News." October 4.

David Corn. 2005. "Armstrong Williams: I am not Alone." January 10. [www.thenation.com/blogs/capitalgames?bid=3&pid=2114](http://www.thenation.com/blogs/capitalgames?bid=3&pid=2114).

Michelle Malkin. 2005. "Rodney Paige, Armstrong Williams and the 'Pay to Pander' Scandal." [www.michellemalkin.com/archives/001179.htm](http://www.michellemalkin.com/archives/001179.htm).

Alicia Banks. 2005. "Hypocrisy & Exposure/Armstrong Outed!" [www.geocities.com/ambwww/ARMSTRONG-WILLIAMS.htm](http://www.geocities.com/ambwww/ARMSTRONG-WILLIAMS.htm)

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## **THE "CO-MINGLING OF SCIENCE WITH COMPARATIVE RELIGION AWARD:" THE DOVER, PENNSYLVANIA SCHOOL BOARD AND THE KANSAS STATE SCHOOL BOARD.**

Both of these worthy institutions voted to have Intelligent Design enter the science classroom.

At least the meeting where the Kansas Board permitted ID to become part of the science standards served some educational purpose: Twenty-four students from Shawnee Mission West High School attended to fulfill an assignment for their government class. They were thus able to gather empirical evidence supporting Mark Twain's comment, "First God invented idiots. That was for practice. Then he invented school boards." "We're glad we're seniors said," said one. "I feel bad for all the kids that are younger than us that they have to be taught things that aren't science in science class."

Although the standards do not require the teaching of ID, they do not prohibit it either and the language of the standards was changed to remove most references to evolution such that Eugenie Scott of the National Center for Science Education feared they would become "a playbook for creationism."

The American Association for the Advancement of Science, the National Research Council and the National Science Teachers Association all attacked the Board's move. In *Popular Science's* annual rating of the 10 worst jobs in science, being a science teacher in Kansas ranked third, behind Human Lab Rat and Manure Inspector, but worse than Semen Washer at a Sperm Bank, Orangutan Pee Collector, and Extremophile Excavator. Extremophiles are microbes that eat arsenic and potentially could help clean arsenic-laden parts of the fresh water supply. They smell of hydrogen sulfide (rotten eggs) and methylated amines (dead fish).

Jodi Wilgoren, "Kansas School Board Approves Controversial Science Standards." *New York Times*, 8 November, 2005.

John Galvin. 2005. "Ten Worst Jobs in Science." *Popular Science*, October.

[www.nsta.org/pressroom&news\\_story\\_ID=4563](http://www.nsta.org/pressroom&news_story_ID=4563).

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#### EARLY FAVORITES FOR GOLDEN APPLE AWARDS IN 2006: CITIZENS OF DOVER SCHOOL DISTRICT, JUDGE JOHN E. JONES, III.

In the 2005 elections these upstanding folk voted out all eight members of the Dover School Board. "My kids believe in God," said one voter. "I believe in God. But I don't think it belongs in the classroom the way the school district is presenting it."

For his part, Judge Jones, a George W. Bush appointee, ruled that ID was "creationism relabeled" and unconstitutional in the science classroom.

Voters in Kansas won't be eligible for a Golden Apple in 2006 because the primary elections for school board are in August with the general election in November and the Golden Apples being distributed in October. But stay tuned. The vote on the standards was 6-4 and four of the conservatives must stand for re-election. They are expected to face moderate Republicans in August and moderate Democrats in November.

If moderates win, they can change the standards before the state can make tests based on them—the tests are scheduled to start in 2008.

CNN.com. 2005. "Pennsylvania Voters Oust School Board."  
[www.cnn.com/2005/EDUCATION/11/09/evolution.showdown.ap](http://www.cnn.com/2005/EDUCATION/11/09/evolution.showdown.ap)

Laurie Goodstein. 2005. "Judge Rejects Teaching Intelligent Design." *New York Times*, December 21.

Jodi Wilgoren. 2006. "In Evolution Debate, a Counterattack." *New York Times*, January 1.

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**THE “REALLY, YES, YOU CAN GATHER EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT OR REFUTE INTELLIGENT DESIGN” AWARD: PAT ROBERTSON**

The good reverend himself stands as strong evidence against intelligence. Robertson has predicted that a meteor would strike Orlando because gay pride flags flew above its streets. He has called for the U. S. to use its power to “take out” Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez (the U. S. rebuffed Venezuela’s extradition request and Venezuela has taken its case to the U. N.). But Robertson earns the award for putting the fear of un-God into the hearts of the voters in Dover.

“I’d like to say to the good citizens of Dover: If there is a disaster in your area, don’t turn to God; you just rejected him from your city. And don’t wonder why he hasn’t helped you when problems begin, if they begin. I’m not saying they will, but if they do, just remember, you just voted God out of your city. And if that’s the case, don’t ask for his help because he might not be there.”

His comment drawing bemused reactions, Robertson added, “I was simply stating that our spiritual actions have consequences and it’s high time we start recognizing it. God is tolerant and loving, but we can’t keep sticking our finger in his eye forever. If they have future problems in Dover, I recommend they call on Charles Darwin...maybe he can help them.”

What about that tsunami in Indonesia, earthquake in Pakistan and all those hurricanes here at home? Could be the apocalypse that precedes the second coming, hallelujah.

Amy Worden, “Robertson Says Dover Deserves Snub from God.” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, November 11, 2005.

CNN.com “Pennsylvania Voters Oust School Board.”  
[www.cnn.com/2005/EDUCATION/11/09/evolution.showdown.ap](http://www.cnn.com/2005/EDUCATION/11/09/evolution.showdown.ap).

Robertson’s musing on the end of the world: CNN, “Late Edition,” October 9, 2005.

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## **THE “CHUTZPAH ONLY A NEW YORKER COULD LOVE” AWARD: JOAN MAHON-POWELL.**

Rotten Apples awards readers might recall that because time was short and the awards were long, Ms. Mahon-Powell received only a mention in the last paragraph of the 2004 edition. No doubt offended at this slight, Mahon-Powell returned to the scene seeking a full Apple. She earned it.

### **OUR STORY UP TO NOW:**

Mahon-Powell came to our attention last year as a hard-charging person who worked her way up from substitute teacher to chief of staff to then-New York City Public Schools Chancellor, Harold Levy (at \$152,500 a year) and then a regional superintendent under current Chancellor Joel Klein. But it then came to light that Mahon-Powell’s School District Administrator certificate actually belonged to a retired employee, Joan King (interestingly, both of the people who blew the whistle on Mahon-Powell retired shortly thereafter). Further investigation revealed she never obtained certification as a teacher and still further investigation found that she did not, as she had claimed, graduate from Hunter College—her credits fell “far short of the number of credits needed to graduate.” She enrolled in graduate courses at Hunter but the school booted her because she had no proof she had earned a bachelor’s.

Mahon-Powell pleaded guilty to forgery but claimed she had done nothing wrong. “I feel I’m being treated unfairly. I don’t know the reasons why this is happening.” She served 10 days community service and paid a fine of \$1,000.

Lucadamo, Kathleen. 2004, 23 September. “Phony Educator Forges Ahead.” *New York Daily News*. (Gotta love those *Daily News* headline writers).

### **OUR STORY CONTINUES:**

In May, 2005, Mahon-Powell claimed she had been wrongly fired and filed a \$30 million suit against the city. “Plaintiff’s arrest and plea to offering a false instrument for filing were organized in such a way as to be the subject of widespread print and broadcast media treatment,” said lawyer Harry Kresky in the suit.”

Harry Kresky, Esq. did not respond to requests for information about the status of the suit.

Campanile, Carl. 2005, 21, May. “Fraud-Plea Educator Sues City.” *New York Post*.

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## **THE “GAME THE SYSTEM? MOI?” AWARD: JEB BUSH**

For 2004-2005, two-thirds of Florida public schools earned an A or a B under Governor Jeb Bush’s A+ Accountability system. But 60% of those schools failed brother George’s AYP requirement in NCLB, something I have noted before must make for interesting dinner conversation at Kennebunkport (I don’t think Jeb, maybe allergic to brush, ventures to Crawford).

What to do? Jeb concocted a plan to label schools that received an A or B in the A+ system as schools that had made “Provisional Adequate Progress” and proposed to Maggie Spellings that her Department exempt them from the choice and supplemental services sanctions of NCLB.

Florida media thought the plan bereft of merit. Said the *Palm Beach Post*, “Florida’s school grades have been a triumph of labeling over substance. But with this year’s new label—‘Provisional Adequate Progress’—Gov. Bush’s education apparatus has outdone itself...It’s an absurd attempt to reconcile flawed grading schemes that serve politics more than education...The state’s farcical attempts to reconcile NCLB and A+ grades underscore the artificiality of both systems.”

Spellings offered to accept the plan for a limited number of districts to determine if it made any difference. Bush said all or nothing so he got nothing.

Spellings’ doubly depressed Bush and administrators because she had flown to Tallahassee a short time earlier for what was described as a “glowing visit.” After her visit, David Mosrie, head of the Florida Association of District School Superintendents said of Bush’s Provisional AYP plan, “It was my assumption that this was a done deal.”

Nope.

Spellings did permit Florida to lower its target for AYP and to change its minimal group size for reporting. Florida’s scheduled targets required a rise from 31% to 48% in reading and from 38 percent to 53 percent in math. Spellings accepted a more modest elevation to 37 percent in reading and 44 percent in math. This took 400 schools off the AYP hook. Nowhere did I read any rationale for why this change should take place except to save some face.

She also accepted Florida’s proposal that, while keeping the minimal reporting group size at 30, omitted scores for any subgroup unless that subgroup constituted at least 15% of the entire school population. No one referred to this change as engaging in the “soft bigotry of low expectations,” but it frees many mostly white schools from reporting minority scores.

Ron Matus. 2005. “Feds Say All Florida Schools Must Pass.” *St. Petersburg Times*, August 18.

*Palm Beach Post* (Editorial). 2005. "New School-Grade Label Compounds the Politics." June 17.

FairTest. 2005. "To Save NCLB, Feds Ease AYP." *FairTest Examiner*, Summer.

Henry Johnson. 2005. "Decision Letter on Request to Amend Florida Accountability Plan." August 26. (Johnson is Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education).

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### **THE "NOTES FROM A DISTANT PLANET" AWARD: *HUMAN EVENTS*.**

*Human Events* bills itself as "The National Conservative Weekly." On May 31, 2005, Memorial Day, it posted the results of its survey of 15 "conservative scholars and public policy leaders" to determine the "Ten Most Harmful Books of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century."

Given *Human Events*' pedigree, one shouldn't be surprised that *The Communist Manifesto*, *Mein Kampf*, and *Quotations from Chairman Mao*, waltzed off with the gold, silver and bronze, but sprinting in at 4<sup>th</sup> place was *The Kinsey Report* and at 5<sup>th</sup>, John Dewey's *Democracy and Education*. *Das Kapital* separated Dewey from Betty Friedan's seventh place contribution, *The Feminine Mystique*. It's not clear whether Friedan's high standing was due to the 14 white male judges' appreciation of women's lib or to the influence of the lone woman on the panel, Phyllis Schlafly.

Among those finishing out of the money but with honorable mentions: *The Authoritarian Personality*, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*, *Madness and Civilization*, *Coming of Age in Samoa*, *Unsafe at Any Speed*, *Silent Spring*, *Introduction to Psychoanalysis* and *The Greening of America*. Threats are where you find them, I reckon.

Aside from Schlafly's, the only name I recognized was Herb London, President of the Hudson Institute.

The annotated lists of both books and judges can be found at [www.humaneventsonline.com/article.php?id=7591](http://www.humaneventsonline.com/article.php?id=7591).

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### **THE "BIG BROTHER WANTS TO WATCH YOU EVEN MORE" AWARD: WALTER JONES, CONGRESSMAN FROM NORTH CAROLINA AND DENNIS BAXLEY, A FLORIDA STATE REPRESENTATIVE**

Jones, a Republican (they're for small government, right?), introduced H. R. 2295 to "prohibit a State from receiving Federal education funds unless the State has certain policies and procedures regarding the purchase or acquisition of library and classroom-

based reference, instructional, and other print materials for use in elementary schools, and for other purposes.”

Jones permitted his proposed law to be cited as “The Parental Empowerment Act of 2005.” It would have established parent councils of 5 to 15 people for every public school in the nation. At least once every six months these councils would meet and review recommended school library purchases “to determine whether part of the proposed acquisition is appropriate.”

Jones introduced his bill after reading in the *Wilmington News* that a couple had suffered discomfort as their 7-year-old daughter read aloud to them from *King and King*, a gay-positive (as characterized by the ALA) picture book she had checked out of the school library. It tells of a prince who rejects a bevy of eligible princesses to marry the brother of one of them. In a sequel, *King & King & Family*, which was published in spring, 2005, the couple adopts Princess Daisy. “My child is not old enough to understand something like that, especially when it’s not in our beliefs,” said father, Michael Hartsell. A non sequitur award for Mr. Hartsell, please, and a copy of “Sugartime!”

The bill apparently never made it out of subcommittee.

For his part, Baxley conjured up the Academic Freedom of Bill of Rights and a lot of people thought he had produced the ghost of Joe McCarthy as well. The idea of AFBOR was not Baxley’s but David Horowitz’s, a person somewhere to the right of...everyone else. According to the *Independent Florida Alligator*

The bill sets a statewide standard that students cannot be punished for professing beliefs with which their professors disagree. Professors would also be advised to teach alternative “serious academic theories” that may disagree with their personal views.

According to a legislative staff analysis of the bill, the law would give students who think their beliefs are not being respected legal standing to sue professors and universities.

Students who believe their professor is singling them out for “public ridicule”—for instance, when professors use the Socratic method to force students to explain their theories in class—would also be given the right to sue.

The bill produced visions of suits by Holocaust-deniers, people who say astronauts never landed on the moon, or who believe that birth control is a sin. Baxley’s own example of a position worthy to litigate: “Some professors say ‘Evolution is a fact. I don’t want to hear about intelligent design, and if you don’t like it, there’s the door.’”

Baxley compared universities to children who should not be given money without some guidance. This bill died, too, but might be reborn in the next legislative session.

Horowitz' efforts have met with failure in 4 or 5 states, but are active in a dozen more.

Joyce Howard Price. "Gay Princes Book Irks Girl's Parents." *Washington Times*, March 19, 2004.

Note: The identifier, *Wilmington News*, was in a story from the American Library Association. There doesn't appear to be a *Wilmington News*. The story received substantial coverage in the Christian press and the gay and lesbian press. All articles that contained quotes took them from the *Washington Times* piece cited above.

James Vanlandingham. 2005. "Capitol Bill Aims to Control 'Leftist' Profs." *Independent Florida Alligator* (University of Florida, Gainesville), March 23.

Bill Berkowitz. 2005. "David Horowitz's Battlefield Academia." [www.commondreams.org/views05/0714-23.htm](http://www.commondreams.org/views05/0714-23.htm).

Michael Janofsky. 2005. "Professors' Politics Draw Lawmakers into Fray." *New York Times*, December 25.

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## **THE "I'M NOT A RESEARCHER" AWARD: DIANE RAVITCH**

In the months leading up to a 1992 debate with Diane Ravitch at the Education Writers Association meeting in, I heard she was nervous about it and kept saying, "I'm not a researcher." I wondered at the time if that were true why she was assistant secretary of education at the Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

Maybe not being a researcher caused her to fail to notice the contradiction in her numbers in her *New York Times* op-ed of November 7. Ravitch first lamented that we had "50 states, 50 standards, 50 tests" as part of NCLB. She wanted one test and she'd be happy with NAEP.

Ravitch then observed, as many have, that state tests find higher proportions of proficient kids than NAEP does. She gave examples: Idaho says 90% of its 4<sup>th</sup> graders are proficient in math, NAEP says 41%. New York says 85%, NAEP 36%. North Carolina, 92%, NAEP 40%. And on and on and for reading, too.

She then added, "Our fourth-grade students generally do well when compared with their peers in other nations." This is certainly true. In the original TIMSS, American 4<sup>th</sup>-graders scored above average in math and third in the world in science among the 26 participating nations. But in the same year, NAEP pronounced only 20% of 4<sup>th</sup> graders proficient or better in math, 32% in science.

Well, if we score so well in the international arena, well, er, ah, could it be that it's the *NAEP* achievement levels that are off? That's certainly what the GAO, CRESST, NAS and NAE thought when they looked at the achievement levels. They said the process was goofy, lacked evidence of validity and gave unreasonable results such as those in the preceding paragraph.

Footnote: At one point, Ravitch contrasts the politics-laden environments of states to the "independent, bipartisan governing board" of NAEP. That would be NAGB and those of us around when Checker Finn and his merry band of NAGB ideologues established the levels, and tried to summarily fire the evaluators who told him the process didn't work (the contract, as it turned out, forbade that) will get a hoot out of Diane's characterization.

Footnote 2: The debate never happened. EWA Executive Director, Lisa Walker gave us the question we were to consider: *Are Schools As Bad As They Say?* Although I was taking the negative, I went first. Ravitch then rose and said, "That's not really an interesting question" and provided an irrelevant historical analysis.

Footnote 3: The evaluators Finn tried to fire were Dan Stufflebeam, Michael Scriven and Dick Jaeger.

Diane Ravitch. 2005. "Every State Left Behind." *New York Times*, November 7.

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**THE "THE ENEMY OF MY ENEMY MIGHT STILL NOT BE MY BUDDY"  
AWARD: THE UNITED FEDERATION OF TEACHERS.**

Diane Ravitch spent the 555 pages of *Left Back* blaming John Dewey and those he influenced for the terrible state of America's schools. An example of the quality of the book's scholarship: The Eight-Year Study receives less than a page of exposition and of it Ravitch says, "The study was supposed to show that students would do just as well in college without the straitjacket of entrance requirements" (p. 281).

Not quite. The Eight-Year Study grew out of the 1930 meeting of the Progressive Education Association. The PEA attendees proposed many high school reforms. About these Wilfrid Aiken wrote "in the course of the two-day discussion many proposals for the improvement of the work of our secondary schools were made and generally approved. But almost every suggestion was met with the question 'Yes, that should be done in our high schools, but it can't be done without risking students' chances of being admitted to college.'"

So the PEA persuaded colleges, starting in 1932, to drop the usual admissions criteria for graduates of 30 schools that Lamar Alexander would later have called "break-the-mold" schools. The study was to determine if the sample of 1,475 students educated in these schools could cope with college as well as a matched sample of students admitted using

traditional criteria. A rather different purpose than challenging the “straitjacket of entrance requirements.”

They did better in both academic and nonacademic outcomes. “The guinea pigs wrote more, talked more, took a livelier interest in politics and social problems, went to more dances, had more dates. There were more dynamos than grinds.”

In addition, in Ralph Tyler’s eyes, the study legitimized educational evaluation procedures as tools to examine the attainment or not of the main objectives of an educational program. Tyler lamented that the outbreak of World War II muted the study’s impact.

Given Ravitch’s wretched book dissing Dewey, it came as quite a shock to learn that the United Federation of Teachers bestowed upon her its John Dewey Award. I said at the time it was like the Southern Poverty Law Center bequeathing a social justice award to David Duke (a number of people, including Checker Finn and Rick Hess, apparently not understanding the concept of an analogy, accused me of comparing Ravitch to Duke).

Former public school teacher and publisher, George Schmidt, said if Ravitch received the John Dewey award, the Pope should get the Margaret Sanger Prize. Joanne Yatvin of Portland State and a former public school teacher, chastised the UFT, “Ravitch would not know a good classroom if she fell into it. What were you thinking?”

The UFT was thinking politics and allies. Michelle Boden, a UFT VP, gave the game away: “The John Dewey Award has nothing to do with John Dewey. It doesn’t matter if Diane Ravitch disagrees with him. It only matters that she’s the last national education figure out there who supports the UFT.” Of that, Norman Scott wrote “In the weird UFT world of policy-driven-by-public-relations, the fact that Ravitch has become a critic of the BloomKlein reforms becomes the primary motivational factor—the enemy of my enemy is my friend.” (BloomKlein = fusion of NYC Mayor Michael Bloomberg and NYC schools Chancellor Joel Klein).

Scott suggested the prize be renamed as the “Pataki/Shelly Silver Political Expediency Award” after New York Governor George Pataki and Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, two other recent Dewey recipients.

Norman Scott. 2005. “Diane Ravitch and John Dewey Award: Not a Match.” *The Wave* (Rockaway, NY), April 8.

Wilfrid Aiken. 1942. *The Story of the Eight-Year Study*. New York: Harper and Brothers.

Ralph Tyler. 1976. *Perspectives on American Education: Reflections on the Past, Challenges for the Future*. Chicago: Science Research Associates, p. 40-41.

Edward Knight. 1952. *Fifty Years of American Education, 1900-1950*. New York: Ronald Press, p. 114-115.

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## **THE “DELUSIONS DIE HARD” AWARD: AMY WILKINS, EDUCATION TRUST**

Last year, the Education Trust’s Executive Director, Kati Haycock, received a Rotten Apple for calling racist positions that I and Richard Rothstein take on education reform. We say it takes more than schools. This year, I escaped the label (in print anyway), but the Trust’s Amy Wilkins tarred Richard again, along with Lawrence Mishel, president of the Economic Policy Institute.

In “No Surrender,” appearing in the “Education Gadfly,” Checker Finn’s Fordham Foundation newsletter, Wilkins wrote

Faced with damage that racism and poverty inflict, too many educators have simply given up on these (poor) children, insisting that as much as they care about these kids, they are powerless to change their life chances until someone else acts to improve the condition of their families and their communities. And they back up their claims and their inaction with people like Messrs Mishel and Rothstein.

Well, if there are educators doing nothing and using me and Richard and Larry as their excuse, they have badly misread all of us. The key clause in the quote is “until someone else acts.” None of us have ever taken such a position. We all insist, though, that schools can’t do it alone. Schools alone can’t cure fetal alcohol syndrome, lead poisoning, low birth-weight-induced cognitive deficits, undetected hearing and vision deficits or asthma, rampant in some urban areas. Educators alone cannot insure that poor mothers-to-be get proper prenatal care or that poor children get the kinds of eye and dental examinations they need or treatment for ear infections, infections which if treated are nothing serious but if not can cause hearing loss, etc. Schools alone cannot eliminate dangerous working conditions, sub-poverty wages or erratic housing patterns.

I have called poverty a condition, like gravity. Like gravity, poverty affects everything. David Shipler, author of *Invisible in America: The Working Poor* prefers an ecosystem model. That works, too. Barbara Ehrenreich develops no metaphor, but her *Nickel and Dimed: On Not Making it in America*, presents some powerful stories.

Amy Wilkins. 2005. “No Surrender.” [www.edexcellence.net](http://www.edexcellence.net). Click on “Gadfly” and search for the September 22 issue in “back issues.”

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## THE “MIKE COHEN AND MATT GANDAL MEMORIAL CONFUSION OF RATES WITH SCORES” AWARD: THE ACHIEVEMENT ALLIANCE.

The Alliance is a spin-off of the Education Trust and is also supported by the National Council of La Raza, the National Center for Educational Accountability, the Business Roundtable, and the Citizens Commission on Civil Rights and one wonders if all of these organizations really know what they’re backing.

The Alliance’s credo is “We believe that the No Child Left Behind Act represents the nation’s best hope for raising the academic performance of all students and closing achievement gaps. Our goal is to provide accurate, nonpartisan information about student achievement.” They don’t say if they also believe in Santa Claus and the Tooth Fairy.

The “accuracy” goal falls short because they consistently fall into the same trap as Cohen and Gandal of Achieve did (which earned that duo a Rotten Apple last year). This trap is so misleading and so common these days (it snares virtually every state) that I digress from the award presentation per se for a moment to explain it. A full treatment is given in my Research column in the December, 2005 issue of *Phi Delta Kappan*, but the essential point can be stated thusly: *reporting only passing rates or the proportion of students meeting state standards can hide an **increasing** achievement gap.*

Consider this hypothetical situation:

Hypothetical Data			
Score Needed to Pass (or Meet State Standard) = 60			
	Pass Rate	Average Score	Gap
Black students, 2004	60%	62	16
White students, 2004	100%	78	
Black students, 2005	70%	68	24
White students, 2005	100%	92	

Looking at only the passing rate as a measure of achievement gap, the gap is closing, dropping from 40% in 2004 to 30% in 2005. Scores tell a different tale. The Black-White gap in 2004 is 16 points. Black students increase both their average score and their pass rate from 2004 to 2005. White students show no increase in pass rate, but their scores jump such that the gap in 2005 has *grown* to 24 points.

David Herszenhorn of the *New York Times* informed me that this actually happened in 2005 in New York. Pass rates in the city went up. Pass rates in the suburbs were already high and showed little or no increase but the scores went up—a lot (he said editors cut the

relevant paragraphs of his story for space). *As long as the focus is on only the pass rate, increases in scores and increases in the gap will be invisible.* (Incidentally, gifted children advocate Susan Goodkin claims this focus on the pass rate harms teachers and children. Writing of her district, Goodkin says “The highest ‘grade’ a child can receive indicates only that he or she ‘meets/exceeds the standard.’ The unmistakable message to teachers—and to students—is that it makes no difference whether a child barely meets the proficiency standard or exceeds it.” The December Research column also reports a study by Jennifer Booher-Jennings showing that instruction focuses on students perceived to be near the passing score, ignoring the “hopeless cases” and the “sure things”).

The increasing score gap is not a mathematical certainty, but Achieve and the Achievement Alliance are making a grievous and perhaps fatal methodological error if they do not at least examine scores as well as pass rates. The standards students have to meet are all arbitrary—no state, to the best of my knowledge has established any external criteria by which to validate them.

If we knew that the passing score insured enough knowledge that students could function in the future, we could perhaps ignore the actual scores students obtained. Passing would be enough. But we have no evidence that the scores mean anything in the rest of the world, only that students with that score or better passed the test. Evidence from Massachusetts indicates that students who pass its graduation test have no more knowledge or skill than those who graduated in the before the test existed. When the Technical Advisory Committee to the Virginia Board of Education kept insisting that the state conduct such a validity study, the Board dissolved the committee.

A section of each Achievement Alliance newsletter is headlined “It’s Being Done” and features the accomplishments of some high-poverty, high-minority school. As I noted in an earlier post to EDDRA, the Alliance claimed that African American students in one school had higher scores than whites. It wasn’t true. More African American students met state standards, but none of them obtained the highest possible score. Enough whites did attain the highest score to give them a higher average score.

The Alliance could be given the “Over the Top Simplistic Spin” Award. In its December newsletter, the Alliance reported on the Lapwai Elementary School in Idaho. By all accounts, Lapwai has made great progress, but listen to the mawkish description from the Alliance: “Flying back home (from a conference) in a puddle-jumper, the teachers held hands and pledged to each other that they would do whatever it took to make sure their students wouldn’t be left behind in the future.” While acknowledging that this emotional moment was followed by years of “slogging,” the newsletter mentions only the teachers.

A Boise State University report on the Idaho Reading Initiative gives a cooler, more dispassionate account. The Boise State report also identifies Lapwai as a success story and lists 9 strategies that helped produce the accomplishment.

Among them:

Introducing all-day kindergarten  
Creating extended day programs  
Reducing class size  
Targeting professional development  
Establishing tutoring services.

What do these strategies have in common? They all cost money.

So did the hiring of a multicultural coordinator.

The school received external grants in excess of \$2 million, which amounted to about \$6623 per student in the 302 student school. The Achievement Alliance mentions none of this.

Trying to get an overall fix on scores for Lapwai is frustrating. For reasons given above, the use of percent meeting standards is squishy—no state has established any sort of external criteria to validate these standards. Other results show most Lapwai students scoring below the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile on the ITBS and show as well a decrease in the percent of students scoring at grade level as one moves up the grade ladder. But no report puts all this together.

Make no mistake. By all accounts the superintendent and the teachers have worked hard to improve things and have—5 years ago only 16 percent of the students met state standards and in 2004 in some areas it was 100 percent. Overhyping the outcomes as the Alliance does diminishes the real achievements of the schools it recognizes.

Susan Goodkin. 2005. “Leave no Gifted Child Behind.” *Washington Post*. December 27.

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## **THE “GEORGE W. BUSH-STYLE ACCOUNTABILITY” AWARD: CHESTER E. “CHECKER” FINN, JR.**

Several Rotten Apples last year told the tale of the *Times* story about charter schools’ performance on NAEP and the Right’s hissy fit that followed. The full page ad in the *Times* might be considered a *folie a trente et un*, with 31 academics allowing their good names to be used to denigrate the study and the *Times*, Jeanne Allen’s Center for Education Reform ponying up the \$125,000 cost. Four months later a U. S. Department of Education analysis presented the same data with the same conclusion as the *Times* reported as if nothing had happened. Quite farcical, all in all.

Martin Carnoy of Stanford, Lawrence Mishel of the Economic Policy Institute and Richard Rothstein and Rebecca Jacobsen of Columbia chronicled the events and more in

*The Charter School Dust-Up.* The authors reported the NAEP results and the criticisms from charter school supporters, then critiqued the criticisms. They then explored the #1 contention from supporters—that children in charters are much more disadvantaged than those in public schools even when “superficial” data show them similar in ethnic and socioeconomic make up. They aren’t, really. Then came a review of many charter school evaluations from around the country.

The authors hoped the analysis would lead to a consensus about what standards should be applied in the future to evaluate charter schools—and public schools, too. They didn’t get it. The April 21 issue of his newsletter, “The Gadfly,” found Finn fuming thusly:

These people sure have nerve, pretending to analyze in scholarly fashion the now famous contretemps...The crucial thing to know about the authors of this 186 pager is that they intensely dislike charter schools and all other threats to the public-school monopoly. [They] all have lengthy track records on the subject. Indeed taking shots at choice-style education reforms is their vocation and possibly their greatest source of pleasure....In short, EVERYBODY affiliated with this project yearns to dance on the grave of charter schools, just like the AFT which authored the original ‘study’...” And they have the chutzpah to use the word “zealots” to describe the charter supporters who cast doubt on the AFT’s product? Shame on the handful of gullible journalists that took this screed seriously.

The irony, of course, is that Finn, not the AFT, was a) responsible for the study in the first place and b) responsible for whatever shortcomings it had.

Finn proposed the study on behalf of the Charter School Leadership Council. The Education Leaders Council, the Progressive Policy Institute, and the Black Alliance for Educational Options joined him. They asked that NAEP include a nationally representative sample of charter schools. They based their desire, said Finn, “on an instinct: there are schools, we care about how they’re doing, we need to know how their kids are doing and it’s been bloody hard to get comparable data from other sources.”

Clearly, Finn thought that the design would yield “comparable data” and just as clearly, the sponsors thought that the design would demonstrate the superiority of charters. When the study appeared and failed to deliver the desired result, charter supporters engaged in a time-honored ritual: When in trouble, when in doubt, run in circles, scream and shout. They jumped up and down and screamed that you couldn’t tell anything about the data because you couldn’t adjust for differences in ethnicity, parental educational level, or income.

And just why couldn’t you statistically adjust for these variables? Because Finn, as head of the National Assessment Governing Board in the 1980’s, had blocked the possibility of such adjustments. He feared that adjusting for these variables might be used to mask poor performance.

That was a legitimate concern (the recent state-level study of NAEP by Standard and Poor's shows just how misleading and basically useless such an analysis can be), but for him to now fly into high dudgeon over limitations that *he had imposed* is the height of hypocrisy—as is his calling it “AFT’s product” when it was NAEP’s own. Charter school supporters claimed that charters served more disadvantaged kids, but there was no way of adjusting the data to take this into account (if it were true). And that was a consequence of Finn’s rules. One is reminded of the Tom Toles cartoon showing Bush as a scout leader taking his troop through quicksand labeled “Iraq.” “I didn’t mislead,” Bush tells his troop, “You misfollowed.”

In the same issue of the newsletter, Finn took the Education Industry Association to task for “protectionism.” The EIA denounced the practice of using off-shore tutors to supply supplemental educational services for NCLB. Why shouldn’t we do this, he asked. “If a Bangalore call center can help you troubleshoot your computer or toaster oven, why can’t an English-speaking Bangalore-based tutor help your child learn the parts of speech or principles of multiplication?”

If these tutors have the same English skills as the mortgage hawkers who call my home and wish to speak to “Gher-ald,” I can only imagine the tragi-comic scene that would ensue as Bangalore Bob attempted to comprehend an American 9-year-old and vice versa.

More seriously, one wonders how much scientifically based research supports Finn’s idea. Once again, scientifically based research is needed only when a program or practice is proposed for the public domain. As soon as a service becomes privatized, it is, by definition, functioning just fine, thank you.

[www.edexcellence.net](http://www.edexcellence.net). Click on “Gadfly” and search for the April 21, 2005 edition in “back issues.”

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## **THE “LITERACY IS VASTLY OVERRATED” AWARD: THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA**

Apparently not content to merely bring up the rear in reading test scores, California reduced its funding of school libraries from

\$158,500,000 in 2001 to  
\$21,500,000 in 2002 to  
\$8,800,000 in 2003 to  
\$4,200,000 in 2004.

The 2004 figure comes to 71 cents per student. That's the last rung on the ladder—worse than Puerto Rico. It is also about 3 pages of a book as estimated by Sharon Talmadge, a California high school library media teacher, based on her average cost per book.

A new law which delivers money from the state as block grants could be used to ameliorate the book dearth, but it is too early to tell if it will. Eighty percent of \$441 million in school improvement grants were allocated in December 2005, with the remaining funds to be delivered next June.

Philip K. Ireland. 2005. "Library Funding Slashed by 97% Since 2001." *North County Times* (CA), August 20.

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### **THE "ARBEIT MACHT FREI"\* AWARD: DAN DOERHOFF, PRINCIPAL, EAST LYNNE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL (MISSOURI)**

In late May in America's heartland, East Lynne school district near Kansas City, second grade teacher Christa Price, saw a girl who had been in her class two years earlier, picking up rocks near a blacktop highway and putting them in a bucket to be carried off into the woods nearby. The rocks were left over from some construction work. The girl told Price the rock pile duty was punishment for refusing to do some schoolwork.

Price complained to Doerhoff, who serves as both principal and superintendent. She was worried about the girl's safety (I would say the punishment was cruel and unusual since the child had been hit by a truck two years earlier). Doerhoff dismissed Price's complaint.

The next day, Price picked up rocks with the girl. The *Kansas City Star* reported that fourth-year teacher Price's performance evaluations had been "glowing." Doerhoff fired her for insubordination and would not sign a certification renewal that would let her get a teaching job somewhere else. Seven of the remaining 9 teachers at the school resigned. Doerhoff said they left for better paying jobs and that one of the seven wanted to stay home with her recent baby. Not true, said new mom. "I told him exactly why I was leaving—it's him."

*Star* reporter Donald Bradley wrote that "School board president Keith Riggs' phone (816-626-3152) won't stop ringing." Clever touch, Bradley. Riggs has apparently taken his phone off the hook—it rang busy days, nights, and holidays. The number is correct, though, unless James Earl Jones has screwed up. In June, 177 parents signed a petition calling for Doerhoff to resign (the Missouri Department of Education puts the enrollment of East Lynne at 181). At the July school board meeting, a parent asked board president Keith Riggs, "Did you even look at it...did you throw it in the trash?" "We have it," Riggs replied. "That's where it stands."

This thoughtless punishment is not the first Doerhoff has meted out. Three years earlier Doerhoff had forbidden a 13-year-old middle school student to use the school's computers after reports that he was watching porn. "We don't condone it. We don't like it and we discipline it," said Doerhoff.

Actually, the boy was looking at [www.whitehouse.org](http://www.whitehouse.org), a saucy, not-too-subtle site of political parody and satire aimed at the Bush Administration. On learning of this punishment, the site headlined, "White House Web Site Banned by America-Hating Missouri Public School Liberals! President Bush Condemns School: 'This isn't the type of censorship I condone!'" It put these words into Bush's mouth:

Good afternoon. It seems that the pansy liberal administrators in the middle of some cornfield called East Lynne Elementary have cruelly punished an enterprising young lad for reading the purely informational, non-propagandistic materials published on the White House web site....

In closing, all of this just goes to prove that public schools are cesspools controlled by knee-jerk politically correct queers who are hell-bent on luring our young boys away from playing violent computer games so that they can tap dance to Cat Stevens. So let this be a lesson to all Americans: support school vouchers, or the children of different tax brackets will continue to form a disgusting broth stirred up by pony-tailed molesters who read too much Maya Angelou.

When I went to the site, the first headline I came to was "Secretary Rumsfeld Briefs America's Freedom-Crusaders on Kinder, Gentler New Guidelines for Interrogating Maybe-Terrorist Islamic Trash." A photo shows Rumsfeld with his hands raised to chest level, palms facing out: "Next, Spread the Prisoner's Heiny Cheeks Apart Like So." A set of 15 guidelines follows. It's curious that this appeared, it being an entry from May 15, 2004. [www.whitehouse.org/news/2004/051504.asp](http://www.whitehouse.org/news/2004/051504.asp).

\*ARBEIT MACHT FREI = WORK SHALL MAKE YOU FREE. A sign on the gates of various Nazi concentration camps including Auschwitz, Dachau, and Theresienstadt.

KBMC-TV. 2002. "School Takes Boy's Internet Privileges Away." [www.thekansascitychannel.com/news/1735968/detail.html](http://www.thekansascitychannel.com/news/1735968/detail.html).

Donald Bradley. 2005. "Penalty Leads to Rockslide of Protest." *Kansas City Star*, May 25.

Donald Bradley. 2005. "East Lynne Continues to Boil." *Kansas City Star*, July 16.

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**THE “THIS IS WHAT’S THE MATTER WITH KANSAS” OR, “PRIMA EMIENDA DERECHO? EN KANSAS, NO” AWARD: JENNIFER WATTS, PRINCIPAL, ENDEAVOR ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL, KANSAS CITY**

“Me prestas un dolar?” Zach Rubio’s friend asked. Will you lend me a dollar?  
“No problema,” said Zach.

Oh, oh, oh mucha problema. A teacher who overheard the exchange sent Zach to the principal’s office. Principal Watts suspended Zach for 1 ½ days. For speaking Spanish.

Now Zach wasn’t conversing with his buddy in class. They were in the hallway. On break. No matter. Watts told Zach’s father, “I don’t want to hear it (Spanish) in my building. We are not in Mexico; we are not in Germany.”

The irony: Spanish is not Zach’s first language. His father has resided in the U. S. for 25 years. Zach was born here. He picked up Spanish from Spanish-speaking neighbors and friends.

Zach’s father has retained a lawyer. He credits his study of American government enroute to becoming a U. S. citizen for his decision to fight. “I studied for that [citizenship] test and I learned that in America, they can’t punish you unless you violate a written policy.” The school has no written policy on speaking Spanish.

As for Zach, he says, “I know it would be, like, disruptive if I answered in Spanish in the classroom. I totally don’t do that. But outside of class now, the teachers are like, ‘Whatever.’” Hasta la vista, Watts.

T. R. Reid. 2005. “Spanish at School Translates to Suspension.” *Washington Post*, December 9.

Carmen Cardinal. 2005. “Youth Suspended for Speaking Spanish in School.” *Dos Mundos* (Kansas City, Kansas). December 8.

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**THE “OUR LOUSY PUBLIC SCHOOLS REALLY DO TURN OUT PEOPLE SO DUMB WE CAN SKUNK THE PUBLIC WITH ANY STORY WE WANT”AWARD: THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION.**

Remember the Bush adviser who chided *New York Times* reporter Ron Suskind for Suskind’s living “in what we call the reality-based community?” He went on to say “We’re an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality.” Suskind and others, he said, would have nothing else to do but study the realities the Bush Administration created.

Here are just a few of the realities they created:

The phony Jessica Lynch story.  
The phony death of Pat Tillman Story.  
“Mission Accomplished.”  
“The Plan for Victory in Iraq” (pundits called it “talking points,” generals said they had not seen it before its public release).  
The phony-journalist Karen Ryan story.  
The phony Armstrong Williams NCLB story.  
The phony death of 10 marines killed outside Falluja on a “routine foot patrol”—they’d actually been sent to an unprotected site for a promotion ceremony.  
The phony “Congress had the same intelligence as we did” story.  
The “Tom Delay is innocent story” (“jury tampering” some people called that one).  
Condi Rice’s almost daily clarifications of her previous clarifications on torture.  
NCLB is closing the achievement gap.  
The “we will forge a constructive and effective approach” to reduce greenhouse gases story. Too early to know if it’s phony, but don’t hold your breath.  
We don’t torture.  
There are not thousands of Katrina victims in the New Orleans Convention Center (when NPR “All Things Considered” host, Robert Siegel, acting on on-site information from NPR reporters, informed Homeland Security secretary, Michael Chertoff, of the conditions, Chertoff told him not to believe rumors).  
The phony “Any time you hear the United State government talking about wiretap, it requires—a wiretap requires a court order” story (George W. Bush, April 20, 2004).  
And of course, the mother of all realities, the Weapons of Mass Destruction story.

As Frank Rich put it, “When a government substitutes propaganda for governing, the Potemkin village is all. Since we don’t get honest information from this White House, we must instead, as the Soviets once did, decode our rulers’ fictions to discern what’s really happening. As the administration’s stage craft becomes more baroque, its credibility tanks further both at home and abroad. The propaganda techniques may be echt Goebbels, but they increasingly come off as pure Ali G.”

The Bush Administration not only believes that it creates realities but that us poor dumb products of public schools have been taught so poorly we can’t see the real thing through their smoke and mirrors.

Ron Suskind. 2004. “Without a Doubt.” *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, October 17, 2004

Frank Rich. 2005. “It Takes a Potemkin Village.” *New York Times*, December 11.

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So...here we are at the end/beginning of another year. I haven’t included in the awards all of those school officials committing the atrocities in the name of high stakes testing that I described in the opening paragraphs of the 15<sup>th</sup> Bracey Report (*Phi Delta Kappan*,

October). As with these Rotten Apples, that report is archived at [www.america-tomorrow.com/bracey/EDDRA](http://www.america-tomorrow.com/bracey/EDDRA).

Nor do I include Brent Staples and the rest of the *New York Times* editorial staff who slice through the Bush/Cheney/Rice/Rumsfeld “realities” as if they were warm margarine, but can’t get it straight about education in general and NCLB in particular. I sent them a 7-page analysis of their editorials, mostly statistics and citations for the statistics. The principal addressee for the analysis was The Public Editor, the *Times*’ term for its ombudsman, but the lone reaction to date (12/30/05) was an immediate and testy note from editorial page editor, Gail Collins accusing me of “defaming a writer because you don’t like the argument...I can’t have any confidence in your logic when you stoop to personal attacks like this.” Gee, I thought I was attacking the argument because Staples got the facts wrong. I don’t know how an analysis full of statistics and citations for those statistics can be a personal attack—I’d only need a few choice words for that—but this material is also archived at [www.america-tomorrow.com/bracey/EDDRA](http://www.america-tomorrow.com/bracey/EDDRA) so you can go read it for yourself (feedback welcome).

Finally, Bill Gates gets a bye in spite of his goofy comments about being appalled at American high schools, not because he and wife Melinda were people-of-the-year for *Time*, but because his fear-mongering speech to the governors got skewered in the 15<sup>th</sup> Report as did similar dire predictions from Gail Chaddock (*Christian Science Monitor*), June Kronholz (*Wall Street Journal*), Eric Hanushek (Hoover), Anthony Carnevale (NCEE), and Kurt Landgraf (ETS). The list has to be extended, though, to include Lou Gerstner (whose WSJ rant I managed to miss), David Broder, and Theodore Hershberg whose piece in the December, 2005 *Kappan* qualifies as one of the year’s worst.

Remember, when people try to scare you about the future, they want to control you. They want you to follow their agenda, not your own.

'Til next year, then.

| Jerry