

**THE
ROTTEN APPLES
IN
EDUCATION
AWARDS
FOR
2007**

Gerald W. Bracey
gbracey1@verizon.net

THE “THERE’S A SUCKER BORN EVERY MINUTE” AWARD: SCHOLASTIC, INC.

In June, Scholastic announced that it had “entered a five-year agreement with Dr. Bill Daggett and will acquire the stock of the International Center for Leadership in Education (Daggett’s office) and will join forces to provide greater support to school districts seeking whole school reform.”

The press release said “Dr. Daggett is the author of many articles in professional journals.” His resume on his Web site lists none. I have only seen one, in the *American School Boards Journal* 14 years ago in which he used non-existent research to explain why 12-year-olds are better operators of VCRs than high school graduates--American high schools emphasize literature. Literature is a right-brained activity, while figuring out a VCR is left-brained. In fact, all language is processed in the left hemisphere.

Daggett, heretofore mostly disguised as the Baron von Munchausen of Education thus proves himself a worthy descendant of P. T. Barnum. Daggett amassed a fortune making stuff up. In 2006, in a Western New York school district, he screened an image of a bald infant looking at what appears to be a cabbage patch doll. The caption reads “Holy Mother of God, I’ve been cloned.” Daggett says that the kid is his second youngest grandchild. He says as well, “His parents hate that I took that picture of him.” At the very end of this segment he tells a moving story about one son who suffered severe injuries when run over by a drunk driver (apparently true) and says, “That little guy you saw up on the screen, that’s his son.” In fact, the image has been widely circulated and is available, with caption, at such places as Photobucket.com, http://s34.photobucket.com/albums/d122/m0nkii_xx/RANDOM/?action=view¤t=z4377732.gif.

In this same speech, Daggett shows the image of a mouse with a human ear growing out of its back. He claims that researchers at Stanford genetically altered mice in order to grow the ears. The ears are to replace those lost to skin cancer, the most common form of cancer (???). In fact, the ears have nothing to do with cancer or genetics or Stanford. Dr. Charles Vacanti and his brothers at the University of Massachusetts developed a procedure where they prepared a polymer mold of a human ear, seeded it with cartilage and implanted it in the back of a mouse. The mouse’s blood nourished the cartilage which eventually replaced the polymer. It’s a technique for people born without ears or who lose them in fights. It’s a useful object because the ear, being all cartilage, is the toughest organ of the human body to work with. This image was created at least 9 years ago years ago by the BBC for its program “Tomorrow’s World.” You can view it at www.kidzworld.com/site/p1219.htm. If you put “Vacanti mouse” into Google, you will find a number of stories.

Barnum had some fascinating offerings in his shows—Cheng and Eng, the original Siamese twins, Major Tom Thumb, the midget, and soprano Jenny Lind, the Swedish Nightingale. Indeed, the displays were so entrancing people didn’t want to leave,

resulting in badly crowded halls. So Barnum put up a sign, “This Way to the Egress.” Many people in attendance didn’t know an egress from an egret or eggs Benedict and passed through the doors to it enthusiastically. Scholastic should find a way to egress this contract.

THE, “DON’T LET DICK CHENEY OR MIKE BLOOMBERG HEAR ABOUT THIS” AWARD: NOEL MASON, GOVERNMENT BUSINESS MANAGER AT YUENDUMU, NORTHERN TERRITORY, AUSTRALIA

Yuendumu is a large aboriginal area with a thriving arts community (visible at www.abc.net.au/message/blackarts/visual/s643710.htm). This might or might not be why it also has a thriving community of children who don’t want to attend school. In August, Mason created the “Yuendumu—School Attendance Plan.” Mason complains that kids from Yuendumu “enjoy staying away from school far too much. The names of children staying up late at night will be collected and those children will be used to assist with the clean up of the town site the next day...The aim is to make children who want to avoid school have a busy, tiring day.”

“Children listed will be collected each morning by Night Patrol staff and Police with the assistance of elders, questioned about why they are not at school, then moved to an area of rubbish in the town site and will be required to collect rubbish as punishment. Family elders, Police, Night Patrol staff and CDEP (Community Development Employment Projects) staff will manage the rubbish collection. Students will be worked until they are visibly tired. Water and fruit will be available to them whilst working.”

Anna Lamboys, who wrote the story for the August 28 edition of *Crikey* (www.crikey.com.au), observes that nowhere else in Australia does the bureaucracy “have the power to force kids as young as five to undertake forced labor.”

Today the trash heap, tomorrow the coal and uranium mines, eh Noel?

(Thanks to Brian Cambourne at the University of Wollongong for sending notice of this stinky fruit).

THE “LEARNING A THING OR TWO FROM THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION” AWARD: JAPANESE PRIME MINISTER SHINZO ABE AND THE JAPANESE DIET”

Abe and other government ministers pushed through the Diet a revision of the Fundamental Law of Education, in place since 1947. According to an editorial in the 18 December 2006 *Japan Times*, the revision “will lead to more direct control of education, molding children according to the ideological design of the state, and possibly

intensifying competition among schools and children to severe levels with incorporation of the ‘competition principle’ into education.”

The 1947 law was “based on a postwar determination of the Japanese state not to repeat the mistake of creating the ultranationalist, state-centered education system of World War II and before.” But, the editorial claims, the revision takes Japan in precisely that direction: “The revision gives the state leeway to instill these attitudes (respecting tradition and love of national homeland) in children when these attitudes should be spontaneous.” The paper notes that Abe and former prime minister Junichiro Koizumi promised that assessing these attitudes would not intrude on a child’s “inner self.” But since education authorities will assess these attitudes they could well be intruding on the inner self, says the editorial.

“Japan faces problems such as declining scholastic ability, children’s violence and bullying, suicides due to bullying, juvenile crime, self-centered behavior and declining self-motivation. It is difficult to say the original basic law on education is responsible for these problems. Rather, these problems could have been prevented by faithfully trying to put into practice the spirit of the law, which embraced respect for individuality and full development of personality; the rearing of people who love truth, peace and justice; respect for labor; the cultivation of a deep sense of responsibility; and the creation of a culture that stresses both universal values and individuality.”

“During Diet deliberations, the government could not offer convincing explanations on how the revision would better serve to overcome these problems.”

“Regrettably, there have not been broad-based public debates on the revision. The public is not familiar with details of the legislation (shades of NCLB). It has also been found that the government manipulated several town meetings on education reform, thus lowering the trustworthiness of the education ministry.”

“There is a strong possibility that under the revision, education will become a means of producing children who lack autonomous judgment and a critical mind, just following the will of the state” (who wrote this law? The Business Roundtable and Chamber of Commerce?).

THE “JUST DOING IT FOR THE MONEY” AWARD, PART I: CRAIG BARRETT, CEO OF INTEL

“We need more scientists and engineers so we can stay competitive in the global economy” has been the battle cry of Bill Gates, John Glenn and his Commission, a House of Representatives committee and others. The \$41 billion “America Competes” law which Bush signed recently is supposed to, in part, increase the number of scientists and engineers. So it wasn’t surprising to see Craig Barrett, chronic whiner about public

schools, jump into the fray with a December 23, 2007 op-ed in the *Washington Post*, “A Talent Contest We’re Losing.”

This time, Barrett wasn’t calling for more locally produced scientists and engineers. He wants immigration quotas increased and the visa process speeded up. “The U.S. system forces thousands of valuable foreign-born professionals—including badly needed researchers, scientists, teachers, and engineers—into legal and professional limbo for years.”

“Badly needed?” According to Richard Monastersky, science writer for the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, it wouldn’t be surprising if there *were* a shortage of engineers because it takes on average about 7 years to get a doctorate (compared to 3.5 years in England); because 70 percent of new doctorates take temporary positions because that’s all they can find; that tenure and grants are much harder to obtain than they once were. “Indentured servitude” is what *Nature* called the condition of young scientists.

And yet...and yet we have a surplus. Lindsay Lowell of Georgetown and Harold Salzman of the Urban Institute in *Into the Eye of the Storm* estimate that there are about three S&E (Science and Engineering) grads for every new position (their figure doesn’t take into account openings produced by retirement). But perhaps because of the conditions mentioned above, S&E graduate flee their jobs in droves. Two years after getting a bachelor’s, 20% of S&E grads were in school but not in S&E programs. Forty-five percent were working, but not at S&E jobs. That’s 65%. In two years. And people wail about the 50% of teachers who leave after 5?

They also point out that while American students’ math and science performance in international comparisons might be middling, the reports are in terms of *average* scores. Given the supply-and-demand situation, there’d be plenty of high-performing students to fill those S&E jobs.

So what is Barrett’s motive, really? Science writer Dan Greenberg writes in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* that we are getting lots of foreigners in S&E for the same reasons we get lots of foreigners in our lettuce fields and apple orchards—long hours, low wages, bad working conditions, but conditions that would still be a step up for many people in other countries. Science and engineering wages are low. Barrett wants to push them down farther.

THE “DRAFT WALTER WILLIAMS” AWARD: MALLARD FILLMORE (BRUCE TINSLEY)

Bruce Tinsley draws the cartoon strip, Mallard Fillmore. Mallard is not very subtle and apparently likes Ann Coulter a lot. In January, 2007, Tinsley actually did start a campaign to draft Walter Williams, a conservative professor of economics at a

conservative university, George Mason, for the presidency. Whether this campaign began while he was recovering from his second arrest for drunk driving is not clear.

Mallard is for school prayer, English only, the Iraq War, family values, Rush-Ann-Sean, etc. Mallard is against the War on Christmas, the 60's and 70's, abortion, liberals, and anything Bill Clinton ever did or said.

Mallard indulges himself in a lot of stereotypes. In one strip caricaturing Jon Stewart, Tinsley's depiction of Stewart inspired Steven Colbert to say "it could be clip art from the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (www.jewishworldreview.com/strips/mallard/2000/mallard070505.asp)."

In one strip, High School Musical 3, a man in top hat and tails tap dances as he sings (each line is a separate balloon in the strip):

You don't need a math degree
Or one in science or history.
To teach those subjects because, you see, you can excel at mediocriteee
Anywhere in the Nationnn with a degree in
EDUCAAAATION!

After this, a woman with a not too attractive 'do says, "The preceding was brought to you by the NEA's mandatory education degree policy—No Teacher Left Behind."

In a later strip, Mallard is reading a letter:

"Here's another email from a teacher who still has high standards warning me about an NEA letter-writing campaign..."

Against this comic strip, to newspaper editors. At least they won't be hard to spot...

Just look for the ones with the most spelling, grammar, and syntax errors."

THE "JUST DOING IT FOR THE MONEY" AWARD, PART II: U. S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT.

Sensing that the Anxiety Industry needs to grow, in November 2007, *U. S. News*, premier ranker of colleges, graduate schools and hospitals introduced us to the 100 best high schools. This bothered both academics as well as people in marketing. David Labaree of Stanford commented, "If U. S. News's niche is rankings, that's a little disquieting. It's in the magazine's interest to push rankings into every sector to expand its niche. And that exacerbates the rankings mania that's harming education at all levels."

Mark Edmiston, an investment banker said, “They’ve basically given up the battle of competing with *Time* and *Newsweek* directly and carved out this niche of being the ranker.” Publisher Kerry Dyer and Brian Kelly admitted as much, calling the high school rankings part of the “franchise.” Dyer also said, “This is a continually renewing market.” “It’s an annuity,” Kelly chimed in.

Well, it delivered on its maiden voyage. *U. S. News* generally gets about 500,000 hits a month on its Web site. Within 72 hours after the rankings appeared it had received 10 million. Whether this will hold up or not remains to be seen.

It’s bad enough that the ranking system exists, period, but it’s an awful system. It takes nothing of the school’s context into account. Thomas Jefferson High School in Fairfax County, Virginia, came out #1. That surprised none of us here in Fairfax County. Fairfax County schools educate 165,000 students and the county, sometimes referred to as Silicon Valley East, has one of the densest populations of advanced degrees in the country. Students are screened by the Thomas Jefferson Science and Technology Test and a meager 400 students are admitted each year, mostly from Fairfax, but also from five adjacent cities and counties. The class of 2007 *averaged* 713 on the SAT verbal, 743 on the math.

Do the TJ teachers teach well? Probably, but they could probably play sudoku all day and get good results.

Even the magazine’s attempt at equity is flawed. The first cutoff for admission to the 100 best says that the school’s students must perform above the state average. The second criterion requires that disadvantaged students perform above the state average for disadvantaged students.

Socioeconomic status bias anyone? Schools with low percentages of disadvantaged students will likely be in more affluent areas and, therefore, will likely have disadvantaged students who score higher. The ranks provide some indirect evidence for this. Of the top 50 schools only 7 have more than 50% minority students while 13 of the second 50 do. Among the top 50 schools, 20 have fewer than 10% minority students, while 27 of the second 50 do. Thus, almost half of the “top” schools have low minority enrollments. In the top 50, 11 schools have fewer than 5% minority as do 11 schools in the second 50. Does school size matter? Only 22 of the top 50 enroll more than 1000 students while 32 of the second 50 exceed this size.

The top 100 and the top 50 especially would score well if their faculties really were as awful as Mallard Fillmore and other critics make them out to be.

**THE “GEORGE ORWELL WAR IS PEACE” AWARD: CENTER FOR
AMERICAN PROGRESS**

The opening sentences of “Who We Are” at the website of the Center for American Progress (CAP): “The Center for American Progress is a progressive think tank dedicated to improving the lives of Americans through ideas and action. We are creating a long-term, progressive vision for America.” Educators can be forgiven for being skeptical.

In February, CAP, headed up by former Clinton Chief of Staff, John Podesta, jointly with the Chamber of Commerce issued “Leaders and Laggards.” The opening of that report read, in part, “The measures of our educational shortcomings are stark indeed; most 4th and 8th graders are not proficient in either reading or mathematics.” The word “educational” lays the problem solely on the schools. The word “stark” serves to make up the reader’s mind for the reader. When Podesta rolled out the report, he announced that he found it “unconscionable that there is not a single state in the country where a majority of 4th or 8th graders proficient in math and reading.”

The definition of “proficient,” of course, comes from the NAEP achievement levels whose only function is that of a political bludgeon. As Gary Phillips of the American Institutes for Research has shown, though, if students in other nations sat for the NAEP reading test, *no country* would have a majority of its students proficient in reading. The top-scoring country, Sweden, would only place about one third of its students in the proficient category (In the 2007 assessment, the U. S. had 33% of 4th graders and 31% of 8th graders scoring proficient or better). Only six countries would have a majority of students proficient in math (and not by much) and only two could claim this august status in science (www.air.org).

The report calls “A Nation at Risk” “seminal.” This is true in the same sense as a rape is seminal. For conclusions about proficiency, the report relies on Paul Peterson at Harvard (inspiration for articles such as “When the Going Gets Tough, the Right Gets Paul Peterson”) and Rick Hess at AEI (an institution also inhabited by John Bolton, Lynne Cheney, Richard Perle, Irving Kristol, and Charles Murray).

For statements about rigorous standards, the report called on Checker Finn, the very person who gave us the loopy NAEP achievement levels in the first place. For information about charter schools, the report turned to uber-zealot Jeanne Allen’s Center for Education Reform.

The CAP/Chamber alliance disturbed David Marshak late of the University of Seattle who wrote Podesta pointing out that “you are hawking a report on public schools created by the U. S. Chamber of Commerce, which has been an enemy of progressive political innovations since its inception and which continues to describe its mission as ‘fighting for your business.’ Not for children or families or fairness or corporate responsibility or ecological sustainability or peace and justice for all Americans. Not for any value that any progressive I know would call ‘progressive.’”

Podesta wrote back “We, of course, are well aware of the US Chamber’s history and current policy positions, 99% of which we disagree with. Nevertheless, we decided to

engage in this project because we thought it would be useful in moving a progressive education agenda forward... You may disagree with our tactics of trying to find some common ground with people we naturally disagree with, but we did it because we thought it was an important step in addressing the needs of the neediest kids in our country. We may be wrong in that judgment, but we are not naïve.”

“Naïve” would be a compliment. “Co-opted” seems more appropriate.

THE “POLICY AND LANGUAGE MANGLER AND BUNGLER IN CHIEF” AWARD: MARGARET SPELLINGS

In her first act as Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings acted swiftly and powerfully to protect American children from... a bunny rabbit. Buster, by name. Buster starred in “Postcards from Buster,” a PBS early-learning series sponsored by the U. S. Department of Education. Its goal: make children aware of the diversity of lifestyles in the nation. Before Spellings whacked him, Buster had visited Mormon, Evangelical, and Muslim families. He had been seen clogging, rodeo barrel racing, monoskiing, and grooving to the Arapahoe grass dance.

In “Sugartime!” Buster visited two families in Vermont to learn how they make maple syrup and cheese. There were six children and four parents in the video. All of the parents were women. Uh-oh. Although the parents stayed very much in the background, and no one mentioned sexual orientation in any way, Spellings killed the segment, disinvited Buster’s executive producer, Carol Greenwald, from a conference on children’s television, and demanded that PBS return the money spent on “Sugartime!”

That earned her the Jimmy Carter Amphibious Killer Rabbit Award in 2005. But she was just getting warmed up.

She went on to call NCLB “like Ivory soap. It’s 99.9% pure.” Teachers/authors Debra Craig and Judy Rabin called her “99.9% delusional.” *Education Week* founder, Ron Wolk labeled the comment “99.9% bunk.”

At the April, 2006 NCLB Summit, Spellings wound up with, “There are certain things you can’t teach in a classroom that our students already have—qualities like creativity, diversity and entrepreneurship. Our job is to give them the knowledge and skills to compete.” I believe this to be the first and only time that anyone has described “diversity” as a personal quality. And where, pray tell, did the kids acquire creativity? Is it something in the water? Of course, many people think creativity is more important to competitiveness than test scores and Bob Sternberg of Tufts University has argued that high-stakes testing is a great mechanism for stamping out creativity.

And then New York Attorney General, Andrew Cuomo, uncovered the student loan debacle. Confronted, Maggie attacked. As chronicled by Barmack Nassirian in *Inside Higher Ed*,

The secretary's statement, and her subsequent testimony Thursday before the House committee, combined outright ignorance of some of the facts already in evidence and denial of others. It also unapologetically rejected any personal responsibility for the debacle, citing the complexity of the job which Spellings apparently only grasped after Cuomo had stepped into the vacuum created by her inattention...

Like so many other hopelessly under-qualified Bushies in high office, Spellings brought little by way of independent accomplishments hitherto expected of a cabinet appointee. Not only was she no Dick Riley or Lamar Alexander, her non-patronage resume was actually even less impressive than that of her predecessor, Rod Paige! What she lacked in independent credibility for the job, however, she has made up with officious self-importance and a messianic belief that she is the right person in the right place in history to transform American higher education. Ironically, the euphemism Spellings has used repeatedly to describe this obsessive illusion of grandeur is, of all things, "accountability..."

Her press releases and disavowal of authority and responsibility are ample enough proof that the thought that accountability applies to her as well has yet to cross the secretary's mind.

www.insidehighered.com/views/2007/05/11/nassirian

About that student loan scandal: The top 3 officers at Nelnet tied for the largest single contribution to the Republican party in 2006; as a company, Nelnet gave the largest corporate contribution; all contributions totaled over \$500,000. Nelnet's contributions in 2005 had been tiny in comparison. Why the change? Just as Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid could see the posse trailing them, Nelnet officials could see Cuomo's lawyers in their rear view mirrors. Connect the dots. Nelnet was the company that benefited most from student loans. They needed to buy some Congressmen. Maggie agreed to let them keep \$278 million in improper loans in return for which Nelnet agreed not to bill for some \$900 million (it had already raked in \$1.2 billion). Why the deal? This is all taxpayer money, don't forget. Because, said Maggie, the Department paid the subsidies without question and I feared that might jeopardize the chances of winning a lawsuit. Representative John Tierney of Massachusetts said "It boggles my mind—we allowed somebody to get away essentially with theft."

When the Reading First scandal broke, Spellings refused to take any responsibility (surprise). In a letter to her Inspector General, Spellings explained that everything had happened while she was domestic policy advisor in the White House and that the events "took place before I became Secretary of Education in 2005." At the congressional hearing Mike Petrilli of the Fordham Foundation and formerly with Reading First at the U. S. Department of Education alleged that, in reality, she ran Reading First from her White House office. In a March, 2007 edition of the *Title I Monitor*, Andrew Brownstein

revealed that the correspondence between Reid Lyon (more of a key Reading First player that hitherto perceived) clearly established Spellings' heavy Reading First involvement.

Spellings has tried to follow the Bush line of total secrecy about the Department's operations. After the IG's report appeared in September, 2006, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW) requested the records of the panels that evaluated potential curriculum materials and Reading First applications. The Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) requires that panels like those in Reading First have balanced representation, hold open meetings, and make the records of those meetings publicly available. CREW sued in December 2006 claiming that Reading First violated FACA.

The Department stonewalled for a while, then started sending over material. CREW says the Department was preparing 26 CD's of information. But if CD5.1 is one CD and CD5.2 is another one, then my count says that the Department has sent 98 CD's. They can be viewed at the CREW site, <http://citizensforethics.org>.

As for Maggie the Mangler, a small sampling:

We must pick up the pace by strengthening accountability, not by watering it down. (Comment on Recommendations from the Forum for Educational Accountability, June 7, 2007).

"Three years ago, the stars aligned. The American people decided it was time to reform our public schools." (Op-ed in *USA Today*, May 2, 2005).

"As the songs say: 'Life ain't always beautiful, but it's a beautiful ride.'" Commencement address, Middle Tennessee State University, December 18, 2006.

"While the world is racing towards a global and more competitive economy, our approach to education remains ruled by a mindset that better reflects 19th century agrarian America than the country that gave birth to Microsoft and Google." So, Madam Secretary, given that mindset, how was it possible to birth them in the first place? Remarks at the University of Texas, Permian Basin, April 17, 2007

The next comment managed simultaneously to be loopy and to insult teachers. Tests are essential Spellings said in the *Hartford Courant*, March 2, 2005, because "Teachers cannot remedy weaknesses they don't see."

In a June 9, 2007 op-ed in the *Washington Post*, Spellings came out against national standards: "Under the Constitution, states and localities have the primary leadership role in public education. They design the curriculum and pay 90 percent of the bills. Neighborhood schools deserve neighborhood leadership, not dictates from bureaucrats in Washington."

Does anyone else besides me get dizzy when an incompetent Washington bureaucrat rails against Washington bureaucrats? Especially when the railer is the Flagellator in Chief for the largest federal intrusion into education in history?

**THE “MOST PROPAGANDISTIC USE OF A DISCREDITED IDEA” AWARD:
CRAIG BARRETT, ROY ROMER, SUSAN TRAIMAN, JOHN CASTELLANI,
VIVIEN STEWART,
RAYMOND SCHEPPACH AND BOB WISE.**

Barrett is CEO of Intel, Romer heads up Strong American Schools (a Gates and Broad scheme also known as EDin08 (see next award)), Susan Traiman is an education officer at the Business Roundtable of which Castellani is President, Stewart is a Vice President for the Asia Society, Scheppach is the executive director of the National Governors Association, and Wise is the former governor of West Virginia who decided that professional fear mongering was a good career move.

These worthies gathered at the National Press Club in December to wail over the latest PISA results in math and science (there were no American reading results because the contractor had misprinted the test booklets; another failure of American public education?). Castellani pronounced himself outraged. “This is the Olympics of academia,” said Wise, thereby proving he’s not. And of course, *someone* had to say “Our students’ performance today is the best indicator of our competitiveness tomorrow.” The participants allocated that honor to Scheppach.

Really, Raymond. In an October, 2007 *Phi Delta Kappan* article, Keith Baker lays out that test scores don’t predict competitiveness and observes that, for a number of reasons, a lot of people think Norway is the best place in the world to live. Well, Norway scores about what we do, 490 vs. 474 in 2006 PISA math, finishing 2 ranks above the U. S. and 487 vs. 489 in science, finishing 4 ranks below the U. S.

More importantly, in November, 2007, the powerhouse think tank World Economic Forum issued its annual *Global Competitiveness Report*, ranking 131 nations. Guess who’s number 1? Guess who’s been #1 since 2003? (9/11 produced a minor stumble to #2). Maybe I’ll take up a collection and buy each of these guys a copy (Amazon just dropped its price from \$110 to \$99). The WEF is high on America’s capability to innovate and as Bob Sternberg of Tufts observed in *Education Week*, our use of so much high-stakes testing is “one of the most effective vehicles this country has created for suppressing creativity.” In his *Kappan* article, Baker gets a similar message from a Swede living here: “There is no doubt that graduates of European high schools know a lot more than American grads, but I prefer my kids in American schools because Americans acquire a spirit that other countries lack.” Similarly, the Minister of Education in Singapore took note of American students’ creativity, ambition and willingness to challenge conventional wisdom and authority. “This is where we must learn from America.

Think about it for a minute. On 26 April, 2008 we will “celebrate” the 25th anniversary of “A Nation At Risk,” the little blue treasury of slanted and spun statistics that warned us a rising tide of mediocrity threatened our prosperity. Well, the mediocrities who graduated high school in 1983 are now 43 years old on average and pretty much run the place. The subprime mortgage debacle might indicate some of them are a little short in

the ethics department, but to the best of my knowledge, no one has claimed Structured Investment Vehicles are the product of stupidity. No, everything I've heard and read about them says that the people who invented them knew *precisely* what would happen and did it anyway, indicating that SIVs are the product of a force that antedates school greatly: greed. If test scores affected competitiveness, the mediocrities of 1983 would likely have led us to an economic collapse by now. Surely we would not have seen the longest economic expansion in the nation's history which we did see from 1992 to 2005.

The Wises, Romers and Scheppachs of the world are trying to kill that American spirit that so much impresses Baker's Swedish friend. They probably want the same kind of mindless worker that the *Japan Times* worries about earlier in this exposition. They should be, at the very least, put out of business.

THE "DÉJÀ VU ALL OVER AGAIN AWARD": ELI BROAD WITH A NOD TO BILL GATES AS WELL

Eli and Bill want to make education an issue in the 2008 presidential campaign. Eli, especially, wants to *do* something. He said, "I have reached the conclusion as has the Gates Foundation, which has done good things also, that all we're doing is incremental. If we really want to get the job done, we have got to wake up the American people that we have got a real problem and we're going to need real reform." Eli did not specify what the "job" was or what the "real problem" was.

In any case, he and Bill ponied up \$60 million to start Strong American Schools to promote education reform as a 2008 presidential election issue with the slogan Edin08. They rounded up octogenarian Roy Romer to run the operation.

Wake up the American people? Now, consider that Eli is 74 years old. That means he was an adult when Sputnik went up in 1957. He attended public schools and he's lived through the blaming of schools for Sputnik, for the urban riots of the Sixties and the for the SAT decline. He had reached middle age when "A Nation At Risk" appeared in 1983 and when the National Educational Goals were established six years later. He saw the rising tide of educational reform reports after ANAR and the more recent reports such as John Glenn's *Before It's Too Late* or Mark Tucker's laughable *Tough Choices or Tough Times*. What, pray tell, does he think it will take to wake up the American people? If he could make the Medicare, Social Security, recession, tax, healthcare, global warming, and Iraq/Iran worries disappear he might get something besides a snore.

Beyond that, while \$60 million might seem like a lot of money, in the world of education which spends \$500 billion a year, it is chump change. More importantly, when you are dealing with 50 million students and three million+ teachers, what can you do except the incremental? Efforts to reduce poverty in the elderly proceeded incrementally to enormous ultimate effect. We used to have more poor old people than children, but now about three times as many children under six as elders live in poverty. Of course, starting

in 1958, the elderly united behind AARP but the kids' lobbyist, the Children's Defense Fund doesn't have the same clout since the kids don't kick in money and don't vote.

And then, the Edin08 agenda has all the excitement of drying paint: Longer school day, longer school year, stronger and more uniform standards, merit pay for high-quality teaching.

Longer school year? Craig Jerald, director of policy for Edin08 and formerly of the Education Trust (and you know how I feel about them) wrote that "By the time they graduate from high school, students in other countries have obtained the equivalent of one more year of education than their American counterparts." But Singapore, which generally outscores most of the world has the same school year as the U. S. And kids in Hong Kong, which is also at the top in TIMSS and PISA attend school four days fewer.

"China provides 30% more education than America..." What, pray tell, does "30% more education" mean, exactly? Longer days, more days, more coverage? Edin08's hyperbole about China and India is extraordinary. In a press release surrounding the Edin08 movie, "Two Million Minutes," Executive producer Robert Compton said, "When it was Finland who was winning, it wasn't such a concern. But now that our students are being outperformed by India and China it is cause for serious concern." Given that neither nation has taken part in an international comparison, it is difficult to understand what data Mr. Compton used to reach his conclusion about China and India. I asked him, but he did not reply.

Vivien Stewart wrote in *Education Week* "Currently only 40 percent of Chinese students go to upper-secondary schools." After weeks in China, Deborah Meier and Eleanor Duckworth had a more grounded perspective than Jerald. In an August 18 email Deborah wrote, "the idea that they [the Chinese] have a superior education system is beyond absurd." She was told that in many rural areas, there are no teachers to staff the schools that do exist (see the Movie "Not One Less" for delightful affirmation of this hard fact). And most "immigrant" children are not in school. Chinese urban dweller apply the word "Immigrant" to Chinese families that have moved, often illegally, into the cities from the poor rural areas. They are legion.

Merit pay? What will it take to get good teachers to teach in places they don't want to be?—and face it, the problems are in the ghetto and the barrio. A lot more than the piddling \$5K or so we've seen to date.

When one looks at the aims of Edin08, one notices something that Ken Bernstein wrote about on his DailyKos blog "These gentlemen are ignoring a key first step, which is the rethinking of the purpose of public schools.

Edin08 is just another attempt by corporate America to control curriculum and instruction. The ED in Edin08 stands for Excrement Dissemination.

THE “LONGEST RUNNING PATHOLOGICAL IDEE FIXE IN EDUCATION” AWARD: GEORGE W. BUSH

In addition to an amazing talent for appointing incompetents to high office (remember Harriet Miers? Donald Rumsfeld? Alberto Gonzales? Brownie?), Bush has shown that once an idea enters his head, it has no chance of exiting or undergoing modification. On January 28, 2001, in *Newsday*, I said the president’s plan for education reform, then without a name, was “poorly thought out, flung together from clichés, buzz phrases and piecemeal ideas.” The plan included \$1500 vouchers for use in private schools, the president’s gift to the Catholic Church from taxpayers of all denominations (Bush’s most vehement appeal for the passage of NCLB with vouchers occurred at the White House when Bush addressed a group of 350 Catholic educators in town for a conference).

The voucher section of NCLB didn’t fly and Supplemental Educational Services replaced it. John Boehner of Ohio tried on six separate occasions to reinstate them to no avail. After the voucher-less NCLB passed, Bush proposed a voucher plan for a half-dozen cities. That didn’t get off the ground, either. So he said let’s have vouchers in DC only. Congress voted this down three times. Even getting Democrat Dianne Feinstein to change her vote (all the while saying she would never, ever vote for vouchers for California!) didn’t work. So operatives attached the voucher provision to a \$327 billion omnibus spending bill. The Dems knew that if this legislation didn’t pass, the government would shut down and they would take the blame and likely suffer the same fate in the next election as the Gingrich Gang experienced after his temper tantrum in 1995 (Gingrich’s fate was sealed when he told reporters he forced the shutdown after Clinton made him and Bob Dole sit in the back of Air Force One).

The people operating the voucher program in DC where vouchers are worth up to \$7500.00, have stayed mostly out of sight. Likely, this is because evaluations have found, in terms of achievement, the vouchers aren’t accomplishing anything. Indeed, an October 2007 article in the *Washington Post* was titled “Voucher Program Puts D. C. Kids at Risk, Study Says.” That article dealt mostly with facilities not being certified or designed as schools or not having amenities the application promised (gym, auditorium, etc.). But in passing it did toss off an interesting stat: “The average D. C. applicant is a single parent who makes \$17,000 a year and has four children.”

Nevertheless, in January, 2007, Bush unveiled a plan to reauthorize NCLB with vouchers worth up to \$4000.00. This again flung a sop to religious schools. As I had pointed out in my original article seven years ago, 96% of children in Cleveland, where vouchers were worth \$2500.00 were in religious schools, 67% of them in Catholic schools. When California’s referenda contained a voucher proposal in 2000, writer Matthew Miller estimated then that they would have to be worth at least \$6000.00 to ignite any interest in California’s secular private schools.

With the death of NCLB reauthorization, the matter is now moot.

**THE “SLOPPINESS AS A VIRTUE AWARD”: THE CENTER FOR PUBLIC
EDUCATION
(PART OF THE NATIONAL SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION)**

In late January, the Center, composed of Patte Barth, Jim Hull and Pamela Karwasinski, published something called “More Than a Horse Race: A Guide to International Tests of Student Achievement.” The title alone thus perpetuates a common but wholly inappropriate image of the purpose of international comparisons.

Their summary of the rankings is OK although they fail to point out that if you look at the actual scores you find countries with quite different ranks often have quite similar scores. For example, American students got 58% correct on the 1995 TIMSS 8th-grade science assessment. That left them ranked 19th among the 41 nations. Had they got 5% more correct, they would have ranked 5th and had they got 5% fewer correct, they’d have fallen to 30th.

Elsewhere, sloppiness in much of the material appalls.

For instance, they have a cite, “manufactured crisis, Berliner, 1996.” Manufactured crisis is not in caps because it’s presented as a general statement. However, in a memo to the Center, I pointed out that David had a co-author, Bruce Biddle and the book was published in 1995.

In their retort, Barth et al. said, “According to Amazon.com, the book was published in October, 1996.” Nope. Amazon shows the *paperback* edition being published then. Their comment reveals not only that they had not *read* the book but they didn’t even *own* a copy and apparently had never even *seen* one (not knowing that a hardback edition existed). I think it is quite unethical, not to mention risky, to cite a book when you haven’t a clue about its contents.

On the second page, they write “Throughout this guide, the term *significant difference* always refers to a statistically significant difference, meaning the differences between scores are meaningful and did not happen by chance.” Nope. Statistical significance is only a statement of odds; it has nothing to do with meaning. It means this: How likely is it that a difference between groups as large as the difference observed could have occurred if the groups really had the same means? That’s it. Nothing more, nothing less. Some of the significant differences in the international studies are no doubt meaningless because the sample sizes are huge and the likelihood of finding significant differences increases with increasing sample size.

Their response: “He is correct, but we are attempting to keep this clear and simple for non-statisticians.” Besides insulting NSBA members’ intelligence, what good is “clear and simple” if you’re wrong?

As a final example (there are many, many more not included here): “A common criticism of international assessments has been that they cannot be used to draw comparisons because many countries only assess their best and brightest, while the United States assesses their entire student population,” (Bracey, 1998, Rotberg, 1990, 1995, and 1998).” My article says no such thing and I can only conclude they didn’t read this May, 1998 *Phi Delta Kappan* piece either (or the more extensive treatment in the September, 1998 *Kappan*). Both articles are nuanced analyses dealing exclusively with problems in the TIMSS Final Year of High School (often wrongly called the TIMSS 12th Grade Study).

Their response: “We do not quote him. We cite him as someone who observes that the assessments are not apples to apples comparisons. ..We do not use the citation as a finding, just as context.” Who wrote this stuff? Bill Clinton? The sophistry and parsing in their rejoinders is extraordinary. And, to me, extraordinarily depressing. When I wrote a booklet on testing for NSBA, it received a thorough editing and fact-checking analysis. Obviously, that didn’t happen with this report.

**THE “THEY CAN HAVE ANY COLOR THEY WANT AS LONG AS IT’S
BLACK” AWARD:
OR
“DOPING AND DUPING WITH DIBELS”**

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION’S READING FIRST PROGRAM

In his April, 2007 testimony before the House Education and Labor Committee the Department of Education’s Inspector General announced he had turned his findings about improprieties in the Reading First program over to the Justice Department for further investigation. He would not elaborate.

Chris Doherty, former director of Reading First, the fall guy in the scandal (but deserving of his fate nonetheless), disagreed that anything was amiss. He told the committee “A distorted story has been written over the past few months based on the worst possible interpretation of events that occurred during the first days of the Reading First Program. At the outset we took steps to avoid any conflicts of interest.”

Really? On March 7, 2007, Paul Basken at Bloomberg News wrote “A \$1 billion U. S. program to improve reading among grade-school children was led by officials with ties to publishers including McGraw-Hill and Pearson, a federal audit concluded.” That’s \$1 a year, Mr. Basken.

“Consultants and product developers hired by Pearson, McGraw-Hill and other textbook publishers served on the panels established by the federal Reading First program to decide which textbooks should be funded under the program, the U. S. Education Department’s inspector-general said in the audit.” Indeed, Edward Kame’enui, then at the University of Oregon sent an email to Pearson after a meeting with Susan Neuman, then an assistant secretary of education, saying “Pearson is in a favorable position to exact influence through Sandy Kress.” Kress, an architect of NCLB and a Pearson lobbyist, attended the meeting with Neuman. Several Pearson officers also showed up. Pearson publishes Kame’enui’s and Simmons’s curriculum materials. (*Title I Monitor*, September 2005).

That, to me, pretty well *defines* conflict of interest. And then there’s the case of Kentucky as reported by Kathleen Manzo in *Education Week*. “Starr Lewis, an associate state education commissioner in Kentucky told the committee that state officials felt pressured by Mr. Doherty to change their choice of assessments for participating schools, and later refused to follow his request to prohibit schools from using two commercial reading programs that were approved for use in those schools.”

“Ms. Lewis noted that one of the consultants providing assistance during the grant-review process had financial ties to the assessment, the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills, or DIBELS. Kentucky was asked to revise its Reading First grant proposals three times.”

“We were repeatedly advised to replace our current assessment tool with DIBELS.”

Did she say “financial ties?” Quite an understatement. The person with the ties would be DIBELS author, Roland Good, part of what one might call the University of Oregon Cabal, who told the committee that between 2003, when DIBELS hit the street, and 2006, he collected \$1.3 million in royalties.

Kame’enui, another cabal member, told the committee that his royalties had grown each year under Reading First, reaching \$150,000 in 2006. Kame’enui ran a technical assistance center that advised states applying for Reading First grants. Deborah Simmons, Oregon cabalist and technical adviser to states, too, said her royalties for curriculum materials she co-authored with Kame’enui were on a par with his.

All of this infuriated the *New York Times* which editorialized:

“The United States Department of Education has been rightfully drawn (but not yet quartered) in Congress for failing to prevent the kickbacks, payoffs and self-dealing recently uncovered in the student loan business. Now it turns out that the department also mismanaged the federal Reading First initiative....The failures, laid out in scalding reports by both Congress and Education’s inspector general, go back to the very beginning, when the Education Department created the panels that evaluate state reading programs. Those panels were immediately hobbled by a lack of transparency and documentation...Profit mongers who were eager to exploit ties to the program for gain were given plenty of room to do so. In a particularly egregious case, a senior Reading First official signed contracts with a textbook publisher while working for the program. He attended conferences and actually lobbied the government on one publisher’s behalf.”

In all likelihood, “senior Reading First official” refers to Kame’enui and the publisher, Pearson Scott Foresman.

THE “WE CREATE OUR OWN REALITY” AWARD: SANDY KRESS

In a stunning (and very scary) article, (oh, dear God, please let 2009 come soon) *New York Times Sunday Magazine* article from 2004, a Bush aide looks down on author Ron Suskind because Suskind, the aide said, lived “in what we call a reality-based community” which he defined as one where people “believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality.” The aide thought that was stupid. “We’re an empire now,” the aide said, “and when we act, we create our own reality.” Suskind said he didn’t understand that at first, but “I now believe it gets to the very heart of the Bush presidency.” Oh yeah. (Suskind did not respond to a query asking if he could now name the aide).

I sure got that feeling reading an interview with Sandy Kress in *Education Next* “Confessions of a ‘No Child Left Behind Supporter.’” A few choice excerpts:

“As to the 2014 goal, the thinking was simple: If qualified teachers are teaching to standards set by the adults in a state, why shouldn’t all (cognitively able) students perform according to those standards by 2014? The bar was not set too high. Indeed, some would argue that it was set too low or that the states have the flexibility to set it too low. Look at current math and reading standards in the states. Is it unreasonable to expect all students starting in kindergarten to get there by graduation? I don’t think so.”

Umm, Sandy, proficient “by graduation” is not what the law requires. I also recommend Bob Linn’s testimony to Congress March 13, 2007 in which he said “There is a zero percent chance that we will ever reach a 100 percent target.” You might also check out Richard Rothstein’s “Proficiency for All—an Oxymoron.”

Kress claimed, “Curricula only narrow when poor teachers and/or administrators allow that to happen. It’s pathetic. Poor practitioners do this and then blame it on NCLB. Ridiculous. If math and reading are effectively taught, there’s plenty of time for other courses.”

Allow that to happen? Sandy, you might want to check in with Checker Finn and Diane Ravitch who started out feeling the same way, but who now say, “We were wrong.” The narrowing of the curriculum and focus on testing low-level skill have been devastating, these two now believe. You might want to read Linda Perlstein’s *Tested*. You might even want to visit a school or two.

But back to creating a reality. The website of the Texas State Cemetery states that “the Cemetery is the final resting place of Governors, Senators, Legislators, Congressmen, Judges and other legendary Texans who have made the state what it is today...The Texas State Cemetery Committee goal is for the Cemetery to serve as a tribute to the many people who have made Texas famous throughout the world.”

On January 29, 2002, the Committee approved an application for a plot in the Texas State Cemetery from Barnett Alexander—Sandy—Kress.

THE “DON’T TRUST THE EDUCATION TRUST” AWARD, CONT’D: AMY WILKINS

When a goal morphs into an obsession, facts fade to black. On July 19, the Trust’s Amy Wilkins appeared on NPR’s “On Point.” Decrying the state of American education generally, she told host Tom Ashbrook, “Our most affluent kids are getting their lunches eaten by kids in other countries. The system we have has not served our children well. There is no point pouring more federal money into very broken bottles.”

“*Very broken bottles?*” Seems to me an either/or binary state. Whatever, the statement is false. Here’s how various groups in the U. S. stack up against other countries in PIRLS

2006. The numbers after the “U. S. students” indicate the percent of students in schools who live in poverty. Thus “U. S. students 10-25” indicates schools where between 10 and 25 percent of students live in poverty.

U. S. students <10	573
Russian Federation	565
Hong Kong	564
U. S. students, 10-25	559
Luxembourg	558
Italy	555
Hungary	551
Sweden	549
Germany	548
Netherlands	547
Belgium (Flemish)	547
U. S. students 25-50	544
U. S. total	541
Latvia	541
England	539
Austria	538
Lithuania	537
Taiwan	535
New Zealand	532
U. S. Students 50-75	529
Scotland	527
.	
.	
.	
<i>International Average</i>	500
U. S. Students 75+	497

Twenty-nine percent of all students occupy the top two categories and 26% fall into the third (25-50). The top category of U. S. students outscore all nations and even kids who attend schools where up to half of the students are poor do quite well in comparison to the international average.*

There are two important things to note about these categories: first, the students in the lowest poverty schools are not necessarily the wealthiest students. The category says only that fewer than 10% of the students are in poverty. The other 90% could be working class, middle class or affluent or some mix.

Second, although OECD has a measure of SES, the appropriate comparison is NOT between our top categories and the wealthiest schools in other nations. The media never write about cross-country comparisons of SES. Unless Wilkins spends her time reading

details from the TIMSS and other reports—and her comment at the opening strongly suggests she does not-- I have no doubt that Wilkins did not have that in mind. She just said “kids in other countries” which, no doubt, means the average scores that comprise almost the sole data in discussions of international comparisons.

PISA and TIMSS yield similar, though not quite as dramatic results.

Are the Russian Federation results credible? I don't think so. Federation kids shot up 38 points from the PIRLS 2001. The official story is that the Federation added a grade a few years ago so that kids start now at age six and have four years of school before hitting PIRLS whereas previously they would have had only three. Except they don't start at age 6. Most parents still keep their kids out of school until they're seven so they're a year older than they would have been for PIRLS 2001.

And, I might be guilty of stereotyping and bias here, but I have a hard time believing that republics like Kazakhstan (the victim of Sacha Baron Cohen's “Borat”), Chechnya, Ingush, Boryat, and Udmurt, not to mention the many oblasts (provinces), kraia (territories) and okrugs (autonomous districts established for minorities), are raising the best readers in the world.

I wrote a short response to Wilkins' whinings (www.huffington-post.com/gerald-bracey) and sent copies to Wilkins and “On Point.” Wilkins did not respond. “On Point” said they would get back to me. They never have.

*This is less of a cause for celebration than it might be. The countries that scored at the bottom were much lower than the average than the countries that scored at the top were above it. Thus, the low-scoring outliers pulled the average down. The median might be a more representative statistic to use.

THE “WHAT'S WRONG WITH TEXAS” AWARD

OR “DEVOLUTION ROCKS!”:

THE TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY AND THE

TEXAS HIGHER EDUCATION COORDINATING BOARD

Looks like Texas might be the new Kansas. The intelligent design/evolution argument split Kansas in two for many years. Texas is headed down the same path (Kansas, at least, seems in partial recovery).

John Young, columnist for the *Waco Tribune*, described the latest dustup this way:

“Long before man figured out that lumber could be burned to illuminate and heat the cave, he knew that he could wield lumber to clobber his fellow man. That was the case in Austin the other day in a 21st century way. A person whose job was illumination got clubbed.”

The clubbee was illuminator Christine Castillo Comer who had spent 26 year teaching science and who for the last 9 had headed the science curriculum section of the Texas Education Agency (TEA). The clubber was Lizette Reynolds, a deputy commissioner at the TEA and once an adviser to no-great-fan-of-science then-Governor George W. Bush.

Comer’s offense? Sending an FYI email announcing a speech by Barbara Forest, a professor of philosophy at Southeastern Louisiana University, expert witness against creationism in the Dover, Pennsylvania case, and author of *Inside Creationism’s Trojan Horse*. Reynolds said this was “an offense that calls for termination.” Comer was told the TEA had to be neutral about creationism and her memo proved that she was against creationism. Comer was just a bit baffled. She pointed out that Texas teachers, by law, must teach evolution and, by law, cannot teach creationism. Besides, she said, it was an FYI email and she had sent FYI emails about stem cell research, global warming and other controversial issues and no one ever accused her of endorsing a position.

Her firing (technically, she resigned) came during a period in which the Institute for Creation Research in Dallas (HQ: Santee, CA) had applied to offer a master’s degree in science education. The ICR teaches a curriculum known as Young Earth Creationism. Forrest Wilder wrote in the *Houston Observer* that according to the ICR, “Evolutionary thinking is not only a falsehood, according to the ICR, but also causes abortion, promiscuity, drug abuse, and homosexuality, according to their irony-free Web site (www.icr.org).” In that same section (FAQ), ICR also claims that “evolutionary thinking underpins racism, abortion, infanticide, euthanasia, promiscuity, divorce, suicide, etc.” Wilder observed that “the Institute requires all faculty and students to accept a ‘limitation to academic freedom, an oath to Biblical Literalism and a pledge of allegiance to Jesus.’”

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board asked an evaluation team to set aside any biases against creationism and to keep an open mind as they visited the ICR to evaluate the curriculum. The team found that the ICR’s curriculum, “while carrying an embedded component of creationist perspectives/views, is nevertheless a plausible program.” It recommended approval and passed that recommendation along to the Certification Advisory Council which voted unanimously in favor. At this writing, the Coordinating Board has not met to act on the recommendation. That happens January 24.

Texas Citizens for Science says that no one who was involved in either the evaluation or the evaluation of the evaluation had any qualifications to render any kind of judgment. None had “appropriate scientific training or credentials.” In view of all the horrifically destructive nuttiness, or, more accurately, nutty destructiveness that has issued forth from Texas in the last 7 years (just look at the prevalence of Texans in these awards!), I say give it back to Mexico! But Presidente Calderon would probably declare war.