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Alabama Rejects Goals 2000

Sends Back Federal Check for \$1.4 Million

MONTGOMERY, AL - Alabama Governor Fob James sent a letter to Education Secretary Richard Riley on September 28 telling the Federal Government that Alabama will be returning \$1.4 million already received for the state's Goals 2000 program. Another \$6 million in federal funding designated for this program will be rejected.

Alabama applied for the goals money last November under former Governor Jim Folsom. Conservative groups have been asking James to return the money, while liberal groups were upset that he had not agreed to use it.

James's letter cited "a new and

unprecedented level of potential federal intrusion into state and local responsibility for and control over public education." The decision came following a meeting between Assistant Secretary of Education Michael Cohen and Alabama officials, including James's Finance Director Jimmy Baker and several state Board of Education members.

Dick Brewbaker, James's education liaison, said he was in favor of Goals 2000 until the Cohen meeting. He said the program would have the power to certify Alabama's state standards, including its curriculum content and student assess-

See Alabama, page 3



Governor James

California Report Urges Back to Basics in Reading Admits Whole Language Is a Failure

LOS ANGELES, CA - A state task force is urging all California schools to resume teaching phonics, spelling and other basic reading skills. The report labeled a nearly decade-long experiment in progressive teaching methods a "failure."

"There is a crisis in California that demands our immediate attention," asserts the task force report, warning that, unless reading is taught differently, "we will lose a generation of children" who will be doomed to academic and social failure.

The task force was appointed last spring by state Superintendent of Public Instruction Delaine Eastin in response to California's bottom-of-the-barrel performance on the 1994 National Assessment of Educational Progress. California's poor test scores ranked behind Louisiana as the lowest of all states.

The task force report urges a kindergarten-to-university overhaul of teaching methods, textbooks and teacher training to ensure that all children are reading independently no later than the third grade. It rejects the extremes of the Whole Language philosophy that has achieved great influence in classrooms nationwide.

The task force report says that most children need to be systematically taught phonics, letter patterns and other "decoding" skills that enable good readers to recognize words virtually automatically. The idea that skills need to be taught explicitly, directly and systematically was eliminated the last time the state revamped its approach to reading in 1987.

Many educators involved in writing the 1987 framework, including then state Superintendent of Public Instruction Bill Honig, said that their efforts were misinterpreted and that school districts and teachers should not have eliminated skills instruction.

But many teachers said they were told in no uncertain terms that "if you used phonics you were behind the times," said Allen Felton, a 4th-grade teacher who served on the Eastin task force.

Honig published a book this summer that amounts to almost a confession that he was misguided. "The framework's teaching methods are the reason that 30% to 40% of students in high-poverty areas never learn to read, and even higher percentages are not able to keep up with the demands of reading increasingly difficult materials as they go through school," Honig wrote. "The only disability of most students labeled learning-disabled," he added, "is they weren't taught reading

skills."

The result, according to a critique in the current issue of the American Federation of Teachers' *Journal*, is that millions of youngsters nationwide were surrounded by "beautiful pieces of literature that [they] can't read" and eventually will be denied entrance into the economic mainstream.

Teacher Tammy Hunter-Weathers saw the frustration of students taught with the Whole Language method. "The children were in tears," she said, when they were asked to read texts even though they did not know the letters or sounds. "They look at you with three paragraphs on a page and they say, What do we do with this?"

The 27-member task force, made up of university professors, teachers, administrators, parents and business leaders, is calling on Eastin to have the framework that guides the teaching of reading rewritten to restore a balanced approach that combines skills and interesting stories.

The task force also states that students who fall behind need quick attention from the best teachers, school libraries and classrooms need more books, and learning to read - the skill that makes all other learning possible - must come before all else.

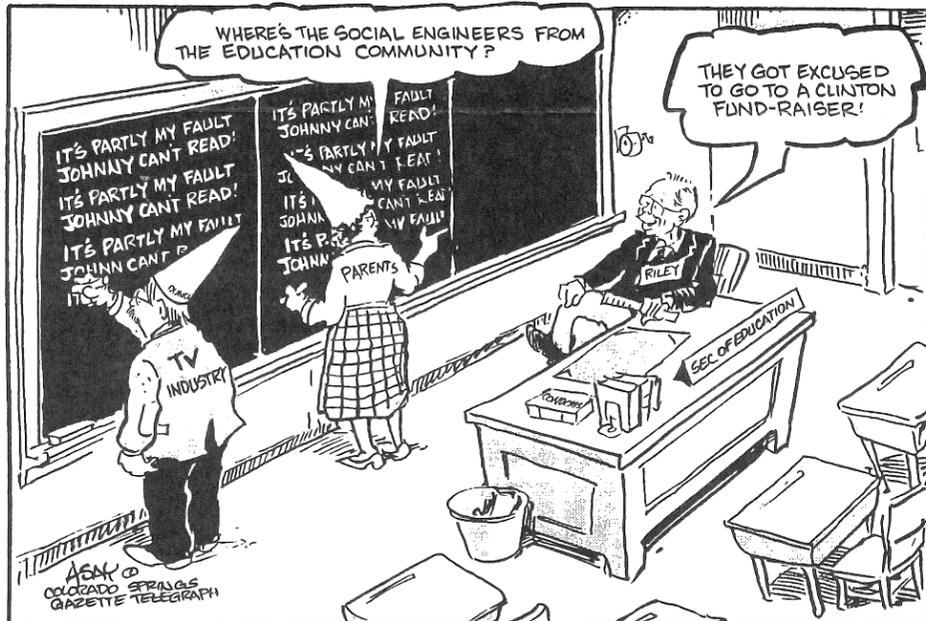
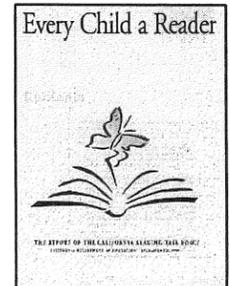
See excerpts from the Report of the California Reading Task Force, page 3.

Major Setback to Goals 2000 In Idaho

IDAHO FALLS, ID - The Idaho School Improvement Committee (ISIC) was set up to allocate nearly half a million dollars in Goals 2000 funding that the state received from the federal government in 1995. ISIC developed a budget that included \$95,000 for a part-time technical assistant to promote the Goals 2000 program. The Committee's decision was all but unanimous.

The only member of the Committee to vote against the budget was Dani Hansen, but she was determined to voice her

See Hansen, page 4



Suit Filed Over Nosy Exams

INDIANAPOLIS, IN - Four State Legislators and two parents' organizations have brought suit against the Indiana Department of Education. The litigation asks the court to enjoin the giving of the ISTEP test in the current school year until the court can determine if the modified ISTEP examination has been drafted to include objectionable essay questions from the IPASS test. The 1995 session of the General Assembly voted to deny funding for IPASS.

The suit was filed by State Representatives John J. Becker, James R. Buck, David L. Lohr and Jon R. Padfield (three of whom are members of the House Education

Committee), along with Taxpayers Involved in Education Inc. and Our Kids Association.

The attorney bringing the suit, John R. Price, told reporters that "this suit is an effort to make government comply with the law and produce public records which the Department refuses to release. It also asks the Court to prohibit the giving of psychological questions which intrude into the students' personal, political, social or religious beliefs or practices.

The law prohibits these kinds of intrusive surveys, and we're asking the Court to enforce the law."

See IPASS, page 2



State Rep. John Becker

EDUCATION BRIEFS

The Tennessee Education Association will lose about 1,000 members because of a recent vote by its parent organization to support the October celebration of Lesbian and Gay History Month. Once conservative Christian groups in Tennessee learned of the NEA's vote two months ago, they quickly spread the news. But the TEA argues that its delegates to the national convention voted "almost unanimously" against the portion of the resolution that calls for classroom acknowledgment of the contributions gays, lesbians and bisexuals have had throughout history. "It's caused a lot of our continuing members some concern," TEA President Kathy Woodall said. "A lot of teachers have taken a lot of heat."

A newspaper reporter in Tennessee called the local NEA representative in response to the August '95 Education Reporter's expose of the 15 NEA resolutions pertaining to the gay and lesbian agenda. She replied: "That resolution was written with an educational purpose. Just like you have a purpose in teaching math, by the same token we have to teach children that not all people are the same."

Alabama Governor Fob James pledged \$5 million in state funding toward a \$15 million program to put the computerized Writing to Read program in about 400 elementary schools. James praised Writing to Read because it uses phonics to teach children the 42 different sounds in English. The education reform package passed by the Legislature this summer requires phonics to be used in schools. "Phonics is a highly debated issue, probably throughout the English-speaking world," James said. "We believe that if young people learn phonics they'll be better writers and readers."

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Manual Describes How to Defeat the 'Radical Right'

Conservatives are under attack by a coalition of liberal organizations that has published a 252-page training manual called *How To Win: A Practical Guide to Defeating the Radical Right in Your Community*.

The manual is the work of more than 60 organizations calling themselves the "Radical Right Task Force," including Americans United for Separation of Church and State, National Education Association, Parent Teacher Association (PTA), Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund, People for the American Way, Sexuality Information and Education Council of the U.S. (SIECUS), Planned Parenthood Federation of America, National Abortion Federation, Penthouse International, Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, and Zero Population Growth.

The introduction to the manual asserts, "Our school boards, public libraries, art museums, and personal lives are under attack by a political movement known as the Radical Right." It goes on to say that, "This movement, which threatens to gain influence with every election, denies the value of American pluralism as it attempts to impose sectarian and extremist standards on all citizens."

The *How to Win* manual includes categories such as "How to Win," "At the Ballot Box," "Religion," "Public Education," "Censorship," "Gay and Lesbian Rights," "Choice" (abortion), and "Environment." Articles provide strategy and talking points for opposing creationism, prayer in public schools, and for

supporting "comprehensive sex education."

As a strategy, the manual stresses using "religious voices" to oppose the Religious Right. It claims that, "with religious support for your cause, you will have come one giant step closer to defeating the religious right."

Regarding the evolution/creation debate, the manual claims that mainline Catholic and mainline Protestant theologies have no problem with incorporating evolution. "The creation/evolution controversy is not one between science and religion," it states, "but between Biblical literalist theology and everyone else. We shouldn't be teaching crackpot science-creation. We should all support the teachers who want to be

See Manual, page 4

IPASS

Continued from page 1

Ramona Mays, president of Taxpayers Involved in Education Inc., said "the majority of members of the legislature voted to cut off funds for IPASS because they were worried about intrusive, subjective essay questions. It now appears that the Department intends to give ISTEP as a warmed-over version of IPASS. That would circumvent the law and the intent of the legislature."

The suit also asks the Marion County Court to order the release of results, by school, of the IPASS "pilot program" exams given last November. The Department has refused to release the results, leading many to question the showing on the exam by Indiana 2000 and "restructured learning" schools. The suit demands access to public records relating to the preparation and implementation of IPASS.



Book of the Month



Fatherless America: Confronting Our Most Urgent Social Problem

by David Blankenhorn, 1995, Basic Books, A Division of HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., New York, NY, 234 pp, \$23.00.

The United States is becoming an increasingly fatherless society. A generation ago, a child could reasonably expect to grow up with his father. But about 40% of U.S. children will go to sleep tonight in homes in which their fathers do not live.

David Blankenhorn, founder and president of the Institute for American Values and chairman of the Fatherhood Initiative, examines this problem in his new book *Fatherless America: Confronting Our Most Urgent Social Problem*. Blankenhorn analyzes our new culture of fatherlessness, along with its devastating consequences, and offers promising solutions in his book.

Never before in our nation's history have so many children grown up without knowing what it means to have a father. More than half of all children in America will live apart from their fathers for at least some of their childhood. It seems that American society has come to accept and even endorse fatherlessness. Does that mean fathers are no longer necessary? Blankenhorn argues "no" and insists that America must recognize that every child needs and deserves a father.

Fatherless America shows that fathers are increasingly viewed as superfluous to family life. Even the best mother cannot replace a father, since parenting is not a gender-neutral skill, according to Blankenhorn. For sons, the father defines masculinity. If this task is left to mass culture, masculinity will be seen as being sexually predatory and violent.

For a daughter, the father is the first man in her life. If that father is absent, it will be hard for her not to conclude that men are fundamentally unreliable. Blankenhorn shows that, in our decade, "Dad" has been redefined to include a variety of models: the deadbeat dad, the visiting father, the sperm father, the stepfather and the nearby guy. In *Fatherless America*, Blankenhorn not only critiques our culture of fatherlessness, but offers a renewed model of the good family man, the father who puts his family first.

Fatherless America demonstrates that, despite teenage pregnancy, crime, violence against women, educational failure, or child poverty, no social trend is more dangerous than fatherlessness.

Conservatives Win Big on Pennsylvania School Board

PLEASANT HILLS, PA - Five conservative candidates won the primary election on both party tickets for West Jefferson Hills School District Board of Directors. Because all five candidates cross-filed, Frank Brettscheider, Marianne Neel, Bill Krill, Bob Huemrich, and Phil Damiani will appear in both the Republican and the Democratic columns in November.

The results of the election have left no question as to what the voting public wants, because all five candidates ran on the same platform called the "Pleasant Hills Area Watchdog Group (PHAWG) Pledge."

This pledge stated that candidates would "(1) oppose tax increases and work to reduce taxes, (2) provide the best education for our tax dollars, (3) implement sound business practices with open communications, (4) negotiate goals for a teachers' contract that reflects the community's tax burden and income level, (5) seek new, innovative solutions to educational problems and their funding, (6) obtain relief from unfunded mandates and other governmental interference."

PHAWG is a nonpartisan group of concerned citizens established for the purpose of educating and informing about the impact of the governing activities of elected and appointed officials. ■

Alabama

Continued from page 1

ment. In response to Brewbaker's concerns that the Goals 2000 Educate America Act contains a lot of "shalls" and "mustrs," Cohen responded, "Trust me. We're not going to make you do this stuff."

Alabama joins a growing group of states skeptical about Goals 2000. States that have already rejected Goals 2000 funding include Montana and New Hampshire. Virginia has delayed a decision.

Governor James said his administration decided to take this course of action "given the magnitude of the issues presented and the genuine concerns created by this potentially sweeping new federal involvement in education."

He said the act which created Goals 2000, the Educate America Act, "sets up a national school board and vests control over standards and educational objectives in the federal bureaucracy."

The Governor said the long list of requirements a state must follow in order to take part in the program, along with approval from the national Department of Education in order to make changes in a state's education improvement efforts, makes the federal program undesirable. ■

Excerpts from:

Every Child A Reader, The Report of the California Reading Task Force.

There is a crisis in California that demands our immediate attention. National and state reports indicate that a majority of California's children cannot read at basic levels. This reading failure begins in the early grades and has a harmful effect for a lifetime. Only a call to action at the highest levels, one that can marshal both human and fiscal resources and bring this story to the public, can be expected to address this crisis. . . .

The Task Force members were unanimous in their conviction that reading is the most important academic skill and the foundation for all academic learning. If our children cannot read, they are on the road to failure. Teaching children to read must be our highest priority. . . .

The Task Force concluded that the 1987 *English-Language Arts Framework* did not present a comprehensive and balanced reading program and gave insufficient attention to a systematic skills instruction program. . . .

The Task Force reviewed research materials and received testimony from various reading experts about what works in effective, comprehensive beginning reading programs. Based on its findings, the Task Force concluded that many language arts programs have shifted too far away from direct skills instruction. It was determined that a balanced and comprehensive approach to

reading must have: (1) a strong literature, language, and comprehension program that includes a balance of oral and written language; (2) an organized, explicit skills program that includes phonemic awareness (sounds in words), phonics, and decoding skills to address the needs of the emergent reader; (3) ongoing diagnosis that informs teaching and assessment that ensure accountability; and (4) a powerful early intervention program that provides individual tutoring for children at risk of reading failure.

The Task Force also concluded that teacher education and in-service training must be redesigned with a greater emphasis on beginning reading. . . .

Skills development is critical in beginning reading. These skills should be directly taught and each child's ability should be assessed. Kindergarten students need to develop phonemic awareness. The formal reading process should begin in first grade where students are taught skills explicitly and have extensive practice using these skills by reading quality literature. . . .

Writing and spelling are absolutely necessary for good reading skills. . . .

Children who continue to have difficulties with reading up to and including high school should continue to receive assistance in reading. . . .

Students in need of additional help should be identified no later than mid-first grade and appropriate support strategies

must be available.

Each school and district must have an action plan for students who do not meet the specified standards. Early intervention programs, including one-to-one instructional support from a highly trained tutor, reading specialist, or other trained personnel, are essential so that children do not slip through the cracks of reading difficulty into reading failure. . . .

A set of performance standards in reading and writing for the elementary grades should be established. The goal is that every student should be reading independently and comprehending fully **no later than the third grade**. . . .

The conclusion is clear. Too many children in California are not learning to read and we must take immediate action to solve this problem. Children who cannot read will not be successful in school or in life. If we lose sight of this simple fact, we will lose a generation of children.

The call to action is equally clear. Reading must be the first priority of everyone who cares about children. We must all work together and focus our human and fiscal resources on making effective reading instruction a reality for every child. Political expediencies and professional infighting have no place when so much of the future is at stake.

Our crisis in reading is serious. It is time to act.

California Department of Education, Sacramento, 1995

Students Sign Contract With Satan Principal Defends Teacher, Made 'Honest Mistake'

COVINGTON, OH - The Covington School Board meeting on September 21 was met with unanimous support for the removal of a controversial English assignment involving a contract with the Devil.

Sophomore English Students at Covington High School had been required by their teacher, Karen Brackman, to write and sign a contract with the Devil. The required work, the "Devil's Contracts," included stating what the students wanted from the demonic character and what three things that they were willing to give up in return. Concerned parents and Covington residents objected to this education method in which students wrote contracts with the Devil,

Satan, Lucifer, a genie, a witch or warlock.

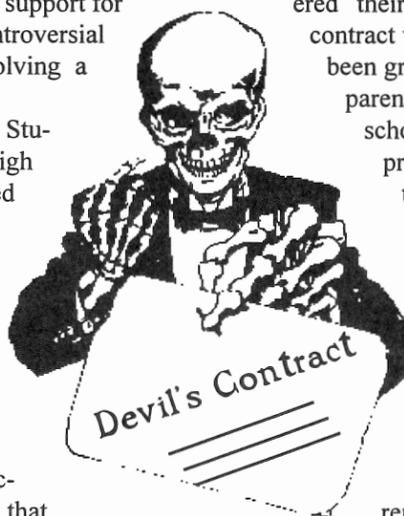
Parents Dan and Peggy Lantz discovered their daughter Cathy Jo's contract with Lucifer after it had been graded and returned. The parents proceeded to the school to confront the principal and teacher. The teacher stated she realized the assignment might be sensitive to some of her students and that is why she offered them the option of choosing to whom to address the contract. The parents reminded her that all her choices were demonic in nature.

The principal defended the teacher, maintaining it was an "honest mistake." When asked how he would have handled an

assignment where the work was to be addressed to God, Christ, Jesus, Lord, Savior, or Holy Spirit, he immediately stated that "we could not do that because of the separation of Church and State." He told the parents they should just "move on."

The Covington School Board took a different approach and unanimously removed the assignment. The Board responded to the controversy by issuing the following statement:

"Covington school officials, in conjunction with the high school teacher Karen Brackman, regret the controversy and misunderstanding over a recent writing assignment in Mrs. Brackman's 10th grade English class. The community of Covington has always been proud and supportive of their schools and it behooves us to apologize for this controversy and we want to assure the community that the context in which the lesson was taught will not be repeated." ■



OBE Mastery Certificates to Replace Diplomas

ANDERSON, SC - Dr. Jimmy Johnson, principal of Wren High School, told a small gathering of parents and students in September about the new "certificate of mastery" Wren will be offering its students.

Controversial because they are a component of Outcome-Based Education (OBE), the certificates are meant to raise academic standards. There is debate about that, however, and in areas such as Oregon similar reforms have led to lower test scores.

Johnson said the certificates definitely will be much more important to students than are the current high school diplomas. For example, he said, a student may get a regular diploma at graduation with a D

average, but a certificate of mastery would require a 2.5 average.

A representative of Erskine College said colleges would be inclined to prefer a student with the certificate of mastery over one with the regular high school diploma.

Johnson said that, under the Freedom of Information Act, all employers have access to a student's entire high school portfolio or transcript, and the employers, also, would be likely to prefer students who have earned the certificates.

"Cooperative learning" is part of the program. When asked what would happen to a student who had kept a 3.5 grade point

average during his high school years but failed the demonstration for his certificate of mastery, Johnson said there would be an "in progress" or "not yet" designation. If the student wished to go ahead and graduate without the demonstration, then he would have to get the regular diploma instead of the certificate of mastery.

When questioned as to where the certificates program had proven successful, Johnson cited Oregon as a national example. He said he has been to Oregon to observe the program, adding that an assistant to U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley is from Oregon and said the program is being used successfully there.

Evidently, not all of those involved with education in Oregon share the view that mastery learning and other education reforms have been good for students there. Jo Ann Lisac, from the North Clackamas

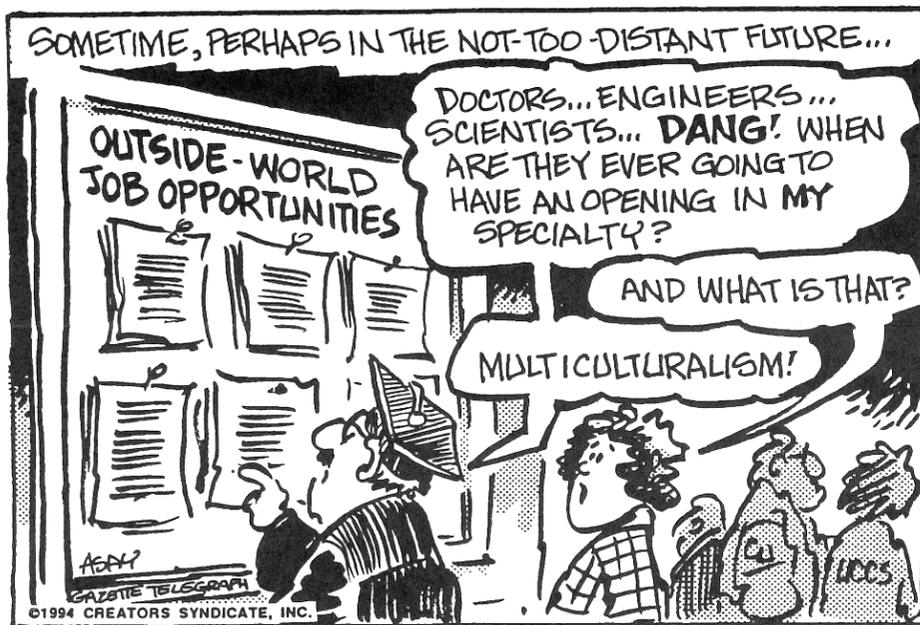
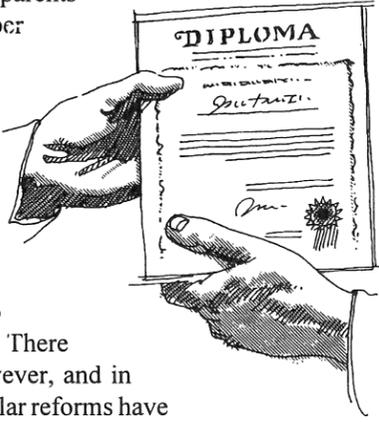
School District in Oregon, was contacted for comment.

Lisac has just recently resigned her position on the North Clackamas School Board because of her frustration over the effects of OBE on the schools. She said that the state assessments for students in Oregon were released recently, and all scores for all grade levels have dropped. North Clackamas is the 5th largest school district in Oregon.

Johnson said the change in Anderson stems from a 1991 document called the SCANS. SCANS is short for the U.S. Department of Labor document, "Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills."

The changes are the result of South Carolina's School to Work Transition Act, which is based on the SCANS report. ■

Reported by Anne Huff.



Hansen

Continued from page 1

objections. Hansen headed directly to the Governor's office and asked his staff to take a look at the budget. Then she repeated her request to State Board of Education members, the chairman and vice chairman of the House Education Committee, and to friends in the Idaho House of Representatives.

As a result, the ISIC chairman was obliged to rewrite her budget, allocating funds for six part-time positions instead, each with a \$15,000 salary - plus \$10,000 for travel expenses, \$5,000 for phone expenses, and 28 percent of the funds assigned to benefits.

Hansen again warned state officials to keep their eyes open while reviewing the budget. Her vigilance paid off. Not only did the Idaho Board of Education shoot down the ISIC chairman's budget; it promptly removed all Goals 2000 funding from her control as well, and sunsetted the Committee as of December 1.

A new committee, called the Goals 2000

Panel, will be appointed to determine how to spend the \$448,000 the federal government has awarded to Idaho. And the dedicated band of volunteers that Dani Hansen assembled to protest the original budget stand ready to go into action again, if necessary.

A second battle is developing over the federal School-to-Work grant. Hired to review it, Hansen advised the State Board of Education that implementation of the grant would require a rewrite of rules and regulations for public schools, and that a current task force would offer new regulations to replace those presently used.

Another panel, this one state-sponsored and more conservative, is now reviewing the grant along with the rules and regulations.

Parents are now working to ensure that wording such as "work-based component," "integrated," "applied," and "contextual learning" (OBE) is eliminated from legislation now pending in Congress. ■

Driving Not Easy for Teens

Governor George Allen of Virginia has unveiled a plan that would deny driver's licenses to students who fail to pass tough new standardized tests. His proposal will be sent to the Legislature in January.

"One thing that's a motivating factor for teenagers in high school is getting those wheels," Allen said at a news conference last month.

Virginia is thought to be the first state to propose linking driving privileges to performance on a standardized test. Thirteen states have laws denying driver's licenses to students with poor attendance, Kathy Christi, a spokeswoman for the Education Commis-

sion of the States, said.

Governor Allen said his pass-to-drive idea is part of an effort to improve academic performance and boost test scores among the state's one million public school students. Some high school students say that tying the right to drive to academic performance is unfair.

They argue that denying licenses to those who fail the tests would only make students more nervous during examinations.

The state school board recently approved new academic standards, and it plans to devise tests based on those goals and to begin testing in 1997. ■



Manual

Continued from page 2

professionally responsible and teach state-of-the-art science, evolution."

For sexuality education, it claims that "majority support exists for teaching a comprehensive approach, including subjects which are sometimes viewed as controversial such as contraception, sexual orientation, abortion and masturbation." It claims that the teaching of abstinence represents "fear-based programs" which are "inappropriate and damaging... displaying sexist, homophobic and racist biases and relying on fear and shame to promote abstinence."

Much of the manual deals with gay/lesbian issues. "The lesbian and gay community is well-organized, motivated and educated," it states. "You need their help, their expertise, and their resources." There are 23 pages at the end of the manual that list gay and lesbian public officials and organizations to join in this campaign against the Religious Right. ■

According to Richard Land, executive director of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, the manual "reveals the ugly combative face of the secular left and its religious allies . . . which have been seeking to influence society and public policy on a multiplicity of levels for many years by doing the very things it now criticizes the religious right for attempting to do."

"The *How to Win* manual unmasks the hypocrisy as well as the influence and intent of the religious left as it seeks to 'win' the culture war," Land claims.

The *How to Win* manual lists the "Most Influential Christian Right Groups": American Family Association, Christian Coalition, Concerned Women for America, Eagle Forum, Focus on the Family, National Association of Christian Educators, Citizens for Excellence in Education, Rutherford Institute, and the Traditional Values Coalition. ■