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Kentucky's KIRIS Gets New Life as 'CATS' *Conservatives fear that only the name will change*

FRANKFORT, KY — After years of struggle, the battle to overturn the expensive, seriously flawed, and ineffective state testing system known as the Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS) is over, at least for now. Some changes are almost certain to be made following the passage of a compromise testing bill, which Governor Paul E. Patton signed into law on April 15. The new test (to be developed) will be dubbed the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS) in honor of the national basketball champions at the University of Kentucky. The question is, will the new test be an improvement over KIRIS?

Conservatives are skeptical. "Clearly, they want to cash in on the passionate public support for our beloved state basketball team," says Kentucky Eagle Forum's Donna Shedd. "It was amazingly, yet unashamedly claimed during legislative committee debate that the problem with KIRIS was simply public relations. Yet there has been a tremendous public outcry for the test's demise."

In 1990, the Kentucky legislature passed the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) in response to a court order to overhaul the state's failing public school system. The centerpiece of the reform measure was KIRIS, the first assessment test of its kind in the country. According to State Sen. Gex (pronounced Jay) Williams, it was developed behind closed doors by education bureaucrats and politicians. "Teachers were not consulted, nor were school administrators," Williams says. "The public was not informed. Even the state Board of Education was largely in the dark until legislative studies and Office of Education Accountability-sponsored studies revealed major flaws in the test."

KIRIS created controversy for two reasons. First, it required subjective, essay-style answers to open-ended questions. Second, it established a system of rewards

and sanctions which depended on schools' test results. Schools and teachers whose students did well received cash rewards. Those that did poorly got state intervention. Independent studies repeatedly found that the tests and portfolios were technically unreliable and



State Sen. Gex Williams

invalid. Additionally, because KIRIS places great emphasis on attitudes, there was little demand for basic skills. Public frustration and dissatisfaction continued to grow, particularly among teachers and parents. In 1997, the state fired its New Hampshire contractor for the \$8 million-a-year test over a scoring controversy surrounding the 1996 test.

In the state legislature, Republican calls for reform reached a crescendo, with Sen. Williams leading a crusade to scrap KIRIS altogether and replace it with a standardized test. Donna Shedd explains: "Early in the 1998 legislative session, Sen. Williams introduced S.B. 113, which would have stopped KIRIS immediately and called for the administering of a nationally-normed, standardized test. Such a test would have cost a fraction of what KIRIS costs, and would enable parents to compare their children's education to that of children in other states."

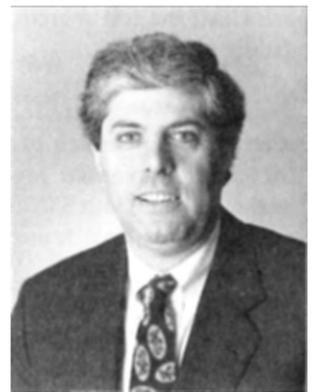
In fact, Williams' bill reflected the will of the people of Kentucky. One senator, for example, reported that he had received 1,700 calls from constituents demanding the test's demise, and only 65 in favor of

keeping it. Even Senate Democratic Leader David Karem, who was head of the committee that designed the program, complained that "they have allowed, unchecked, the perception to grow of problem, problem, problem, until now it has its own momentum."

In February, the Kentucky Senate passed, by a vote of 35 to 1, a bill that incorporated much of S.B. 113, and would have eliminated KIRIS after students were tested this spring. When the bill reached the House, the Democratic chairman of the Education Committee refused to hear it, and the House instead began preparing its own legislation. The resulting House bill did not throw the system out altogether, but called for an overhaul of the test. The bills became deadlocked. "The stalemate made lawmakers very nervous," notes Mrs. Shedd. The Governor, the liberal media, and big business organized a rally and ran media promotions in support of the status quo bill, the House

version. It was difficult for the grassroots parents and teachers to compete."

The Senate leadership went back to the drawing board and hammered out a final compromise, which passed the Senate with only four of the 18 Republicans in favor. Sen. Williams called the final bill "a cave-in." It required students to take the KIRIS test this spring, with \$28 million in taxpayer-funded reward money to be distributed to teachers, de-



State Sen. David Karem

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Study Finds Channel One Costly

MILWAUKEE, WI — The eight-year-old classroom television venture known as Channel One is costing taxpayers \$1.8 billion per year in classroom time, a new study finds. Conducted by the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee, the study is entitled "The Hidden Costs of Channel One."

Researchers used data from the National Center for Education Studies to determine the cost of a single public school student's education per minute state by state, and calculated that viewing Channel One for 12 minutes a day (the length of the program) adds up to an average of \$229 per student per year. This figure was multiplied by the 7.8 million students who currently watch the program. The 12 minutes of viewing per day totals approximately six school days per year.

This study concluded that, contrary to

popular perception, Channel One is not free. Professor Alex Molnar, who co-authored the report, was quoted in the *New York Times* on April 1 that "Channel One costs time, and time is money."

This is not the first time Channel One has come under fire following the results of an academic study. In 1997, two studies charged that it is primarily an advertising tool rather than an educational tool (see *Education Reporter*, March 1997). These studies found that news reports made up only 58% of the programming, while advertising, promotional activities, gimmicks and small talk filled the remaining 42%. Of the time devoted to news, only 20% consisted of "hard news" stories covering political, social and cultural events, while 80% of the "news" time was filled with sports, weather, and natural

(See Channel One, page 2)

Many Schools Are Saying Goodbye To Recess Time

ATLANTA, GA — Eliminating recess periods from the school day is a new trend that is catching on at some public elementary schools. The large Atlanta school district has instituted the policy and is building new elementary schools without playgrounds. Recess-free schools can also be found in other states, including Illinois, New York and Virginia. In the Philadelphia School District, recess periods are used for "socialized" activities that are structured and

monitored by adults.



offered outside the normal range of aca-

demics, leaving little time for recess. Educators cite the pressures to improve academic performance as the chief reason for canceling recess, though fear of lawsuits from injuries on the playground is also a factor. Other educators say parents want too many classes

demics, leaving little time for recess.

Child development experts and parents are deeply concerned about the removal of play time from the school day. Experts say children need unstructured play for "intellectual and emotional growth," and that this type of peer interaction helps them learn to negotiate and cooperate with each other naturally. They point out that elementary-school children should not be expected to sit for long periods without a break to release pent-up energy, and that

physical activity is sorely needed by children who go home to empty houses, lock themselves in, and sit in front of television sets and computers until their parents come home from work.

Many see the elimination of recess as another step in the ever-increasing organization of children's lives beginning at birth. One parent noted that adults already set the agenda for children throughout the day, and that recess should be the time kids set the agenda.



EDUCATION BRIEFS

A new study shows that, among mathematically gifted children, boys outperform girls. The research was conducted by the University of Washington's Halbert Robinson Center for the Study of Capable Youth, and included 276 mathematically-inclined preschool- and kindergarten-age children. After participating for two years in "Saturday Clubs," which focused on increasing their skill levels, boys remained the top scorers, with girls failing to catch up.

Police in McMinnville, OR, conducted a strip search of more than 30 teenage girls after jewelry, CDs, makeup, and about \$30 in cash were reported missing from a middle school locker room. When gym teachers were unable to locate the items, they summoned police, who ordered the girls to strip. One 13-year-old student said her request to call home first was refused, and that she was threatened with a "full body search" if she failed to disrobe. The police chief sent personal letters of apology to the girls' parents, but at least one parent is considering legal action against all the parties involved.

High school guidance counselors, who have traditionally reported disciplinary problems with students to college admissions officers, are increasingly hesitant to do so for fear of litigation. Parents are becoming more inclined to sue if details of their child's past prevent his admission to a top college. On the other hand, college officials are increasingly fearful of campus crime and their liability if a violent student is admitted and erupts on campus. The 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act made pre-admission inquiries about disabilities illegal, including alcoholism and drug addiction, if the student has successfully been treated for these problems.

In Illinois alone, the State Board of Education is investigating approximately 300 cases of alleged sexual abuse and harassment of students by teachers. The cases involve a wide range of ages among students and teachers, and include both sexes. Similar allegations are making headlines in other states as well.

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spite the proven unreliability of the test results. The new legislation continues appropriating reward money, though it will go to the schools for improvements beginning in 2000.

The bill mandates that the new CATS test to be developed for 1999 shall include both multiple-choice and essay questions. Many decisions, including whether or not portfolios will be part of the assessments, are being left up to the Kentucky Department of Education — the same bureaucracy that previously threw out the reliable multiple-choice questions. The bill sets up a legislative subcommittee to advise the state school board and review regulations on assessment and accountability. A new 15-person advisory council will be appointed by the Governor, and the state will recruit a national panel of

testing experts. Donna Shedd asks: "Dare Kentucky hope to get a council and panel who have no vested interest in the previous system and at least a modicum of fiscal responsibility?"

Fallout from the battle over KIRIS is continuing. The Kentucky Commissioner of Education has fired the person in charge of public relations, who was reportedly earning a salary of \$78,000 per year. The short development time for CATS may create problems for the new test before it is generated, because it places the Department of Education and its contractors under such tight time constraints. Ironically, Gex Williams' original legislation would have temporarily suspended all rewards and sanctions for a couple of years to allow a new assessment system to be developed.

How Are KERA Kids Doing?

Newsweek Magazine published a list in March of what it called "America's Top High Schools." The single requirement for inclusion was the number of Advanced Placement tests the students in the schools had taken.

Of the 100 public high schools cited, none was in Kentucky. Furthermore, the magazine's web site recognized 233 high schools for having "ambitious students, teachers and administrators." Not one was in Kentucky, though some southern states were well-represented. In a state

that boasts of the education reform system (KERA) that was to lead the rest of the country, student performance falls directly in line with the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) results, which placed U.S. students 19th out of 21 countries in science and math (see *Education Reporter*, April 1998.)

And last year, 66% of Kentucky's 4th graders got the lowest scores possible in "writing on demand," the ability to achieve what was supposed to be the very substance of KERA.



Channel One (Continued from Page 1)

disasters. The author of one of the studies concluded that Channel One's news value was "dubious" and should not be taken seriously. The other study reported that "Channel One's real function is not journalistic, but commercial."

Some parents have expressed concern about the advertising their children are required to watch, and are outraged over the wasted classroom time. Others are more concerned about the content of the news that Channel One broadcasts. In 1991, Colorado State Eagle Forum President Jayne Schindler attended a public preview of a week's worth of Channel One newscasts (See *Education Reporter*, November 1991). She found that they included United Nations propaganda, reports of worldwide environmental disasters, and repeatedly stressed "global citizenship" and the "global community."

Channel One debuted in 1990 and is now owned by a company called Primedia. Schools sign contracts to air the company's programming, and Channel One provides the equipment. In return, schools are required to show the daily 12-minute broadcasts, two minutes of which are devoted to commercials. Advertisers pay about \$200,000 for a 30-second spot. In response to the University of Wisconsin study, at least one education advocacy group is already calling for schools to let their contracts with Channel One expire.

Many parents are delighted that Sen. Richard Shelby (R-AL) has called for a Senate hearing on the program. Shelby said he is troubled that most states don't give parents an opportunity to decide whether they want their children watching Channel One.

Book of the Month



The Common Sense Spelling Book, T.W. Butcher, Revised by Teresa Walker, 1998, Republic Policy Institute Press, Part I - \$19.98, 84 pps.; Part II \$19.98, 190 pps.

With whole language firmly entrenched in public schools, good spelling books have become hard to find. The phonics-based *Common Sense Spelling Book* provides a welcome exception. This two-volume set will likely prove a valuable tool for home-school teachers and students especially, though site licenses are available from the publisher for use in traditional classrooms. Teachers will need to supplement with teaching instructions however, since the text is lacking in this area.

Originally written in 1913 by educator and administrator Thomas W. Butcher, *The Common Sense Spelling Book's* two volumes are actually two distinct parts. Part I is written for grades 1-8, Part II for grades 9-12. Teresa Walker rediscovered the texts in the 1980s when she purchased a box of old books at the estate sale of a recently-deceased, elderly neighbor. She recognized that the volumes were "full of valuable academic information," but notes that "it wasn't until years later, while homeschooling my four children, that I realized their teaching power."

Walker decided to reprint the books. She revised the internal reference errors she discovered in the original version, and added an index and an appendix. The new edition contains author Butcher's preface, plus a preface by Mrs. Walker and a new introduction.

The Common Sense Spelling Book not only teaches the principles of phonics, but also the rules of spelling, and it incorporates vocabulary development through word study exercises in the form of character-building poetry.

In her introduction, Mrs. Walker recommends a dictionary with phonetic markings as a "mandatory companion" to the spelling book. She cautions that contemporary dictionaries may use a few different phonetic markings from those found in *Common Sense*, and recommends that users compare these markings with those in the dictionaries they select.

Write to Republic Policy Institute Press, 44519 Foxton Ave., Suite 102, P.O. Box 789, Lancaster, CA 93584, or call 1-800-244-7196. CA residents add 8.25% sales tax. \$4.00 shipping for first book, \$1.00 for second book.

Houston's Unique Charter Schools Get a 'Lott' of Results

HOUSTON, TX — Four charter schools in one of Houston's poorest areas are turning out high achievers due to the leadership of an educator who believes children should be taught basic academic skills combined with discipline and high expectations. Educator Thaddeus Lott also believes in testing students frequently to determine their level of ability, and in training teachers to reflect his philosophy.

Lott's disdain of trends such as School-to-Work and computer technology, along with his use of practices like tracking (grouping students by skill level) and ranking teachers by performance, has kept his success from being widely replicated. Despite the fact that in 1996, 100% of the 3rd graders at Lott's Wesley Elementary School passed the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) in reading, the direct-instruction programs he uses (including phonics-based reading lessons) are still not part of the state's approved curriculum.

Thaddeus Lott's roots in the Acres Home section of Houston, where his charter schools are located, go back to his childhood. It was a largely rural community when he was growing up, and families looked out for each other's children. Lott wanted to raise his own family in the neighborhood, despite the area's descent into drugs and violence.

A graduate of Texas Southern University, Lott became principal at Wesley Elementary in 1975. At that time, only 18% of the school's 3rd graders were achieving grade level scores in reading comprehension on the Iowa Basic Skills tests. By 1980, the total had risen to 85%, and

reached 100% in 1996. Statewide, only 70% of 3rd graders in schools with similar demographics achieved passing scores.



Thaddeus Lott

Lott did this by developing a strong curriculum, now known as Reading Mastery and Connecting Math Concepts, training teachers to teach it, and requiring that students be disciplined enough to learn it. For example, practice drills are routine. Students must walk the halls quietly with hands folded. Children learn at what

Lott calls their "instructional" level, and self esteem comes from achievement.

Before the charter system was developed, Wesley Elementary held candy sales and refused technology upgrades in order to afford the direct-instruction curricula that Lott prefers, but that was not approved by the state. His counterparts in education had all adopted whole language reading methods, and the state-approved curricula reflected that theory.

With students at Wesley consistently achieving superior results, Acres Home residents eventually petitioned the Houston school board to allow Lott to preside over three neighboring schools, creating a separate district of charter schools. In 1995 the board agreed, and the charter school system became the first of its kind in the state of Texas. Lott's position is equivalent to a district superintendent, and he reports directly to the superintendent of Houston schools.

Lott's direct instruction program (origi-

nally developed at the University of Illinois in the 1960s and known as DISTAR) has worked so well that only 3% of Wesley's students need special education, compared with 10% of all Houston students. Labeling students "special ed" can mask a school's poor performance because those students do not count toward a school's average TAAS scores, and they are more costly to educate. Thaddeus Lott's students need so little remediation that the cost to educate them is \$1,000 less per student than the district average. Wesley's graduates are typically snatched by magnet schools or private schools seeking high-achieving minorities.

Lott is making progress with the two additional elementary schools he now supervises through the charter system. His greatest challenge is the lone middle school, M.C. Williams, where results have been slow, primarily because most of M.C. Williams' students came through elementary schools other than Wesley and lack basic skills. One of Lott's solutions has been to use textbooks from Wesley at the middle school, and the new principal has taken an important first step toward academic improvement by regaining control of the school for administrators and teachers.

While the current Houston superintendent of schools, Rod Paige, is supportive of Lott's charter district, other schools that want to use his programs must either seek charter status or purchase materials with scarce discretionary funds. Rather than adopt Lott's programs and philosophy as a roadmap for successful education, the Houston School District has focused on the man himself as the reason for the schools' success, and Lott has become a hero in the tradition of Joe Clark of New Jersey and Jaime Escalante of California. While Lott certainly deserves acclaim for

his achievements, it is his methods that have enabled his success. Paige's response as to why the Houston School District has not tried to replicate direct instruction in other schools, which appeared in the Jan./Feb. edition of *Policy Review*, speaks volumes. "The error in your premise is that it's the methodology that makes Lott succeed," Paige told *Policy Review*. "If I had to choose any single foundation of his success, it is his intense desire to cause children to learn."

But Lott disagrees, maintaining that children learn from teachers who have been given a solid curriculum, the training they need, and the encouragement to go the extra mile to help their students. So, while the bulk of Houston's public schools continue to struggle with failed "reform" initiatives, some Houston parents continue to falsify their addresses in order to get their children into one of Lott's schools. They know that his common-sense approach to basics will help their children acquire the knowledge they need for a successful future.

What is Direct Instruction?

Direct Instruction is a form of basic skills education that requires teachers to explain directly to students what they need to learn and then demonstrate and teach the material. The goal is for children to acquire skills through direct active instruction and help from the teacher. This method requires structure and planning, and teachers need special training to do it properly.

Studies have shown direct instruction to be much more effective in helping children learn than such strategies as active learning, cooperative education, student-centered learning, and whole language programs.

FOCUS (Continued from page 3)

port, but more like religious doctrine. The foundation advocates adopting holistic approaches; it promotes the "need to gather and integrate a massive array of data, particularly in the area of health care." It promotes comprehensive health care, earth-first pedagogy, and more.

The Report laments that the very young are being "managed by exception rather than inclusion." It notes that "Unless they become visible because of a problem, they are essentially invisible until they reappear at a mandatory school age. The nation needs a system of inclusion for children comparable to the system of inclusion developed for the elderly through Social Security and Medicare."

The Annual Report also says that participating states must reinvent the way they provide services, and effectively "turn their systems upside down." The foundation promotes tolerance, diversity, the nurturing of our nation's children as a whole, and protecting our natural resources. The Report states: "Such a system, if developed as envisioned, would be characterized by a steady, circulating flow of communications between families and service providers, between ser-

vice providers and agencies, between agencies and local government, and between local, state and ultimately, federal governments" — Marc Tucker's "seamless web?"

This is the religion of sustainable development. It includes holistic beliefs, earth first, zero population growth, redefining family, changing consumption habits, and measuring the individual's productivity. The Pew Charitable Trusts says "our currency is ideas" and that even religious organizations will receive support. The foundation's influence is everywhere: in private homes, in libraries, churches, schools, organizations, and businesses. It has as many as 60 tentacles influencing culture, education, environment, health and human services, public policy, and religion. It's not a noun, it's an action verb, and it's creating a new value system; a new belief system.

While TV, music, and mindless children's literature are stripping our kids of their consciences, a new doctrine is filling the void. It's holistic, having no individualism except where data collection is concerned. It is interdependent and interconnected. All will be assessed, and

worth will be measured according to morally significant traits, productivity, and health consumption habits. The new way of doing things erodes representative government with public/private partnerships. Local control is gone. Separation of church and state is a myth. There is a new church for a new age.

Romans 1:21-25 says: "For although they knew God they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him. But their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore, God gave them over in their sinful desires . . . They exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshiped created things rather than the Creator who is forever praised."

Cindy Pospahala is an education research analyst, and has testified before legislative bodies on educational issues. This speech was presented at the Constitutional Coalition's 1998 Education Policy Conference.

California School Districts Defy Law

SACRAMENTO, CA — Some of California's largest public school districts are defying a new state law that requires all students to take standardized tests written in English. School districts in San Francisco, Los Angeles and San Diego are either exempting limited English proficiency students outright or encouraging parents to sign waiver forms to exempt them from the tests. These districts are bucking the law for fear of low test scores, but refusal to administer the tests could trigger lawsuits against them by the state, and possible loss of funding.

Governor Pete Wilson is a leading backer of California's new Standard Achievement Test, 9th Edition, published by Harcourt Brace & Co., also known as the Stanford 9 Test. Wilson and other backers of English proficiency instituted the test to ensure that all students are evaluated on an equal basis to determine academic progress.

Opponents of testing in English have accused the Governor and his allies of trying to embarrass the state's predominantly Hispanic school districts.