

## Abstinence Ed Message Gaining in Popularity

GOLF, IL — A recent study entitled *Changing Emphases in Sexuality Education in U.S. Public Secondary Schools, 1988-99*, found that the numbers of teachers and nurses who favor abstinence education as the primary “sexuality education” message for teens has increased significantly during the past decade. Published in *Family Planning Perspectives* (Vol. 32, No. 5, Sept./Oct. 2000, pp. 204-212), the report states that



Scott Phelps

“Many of the changes occurring between 1988 and 1999 reflect the increasingly strong promotion of abstinence as the only appropriate option for adolescents.”

In 1999, four in 10 secondary school teachers reported that abstinence was their most important message, compared to just one in four in 1988. “In 1999,” says the report, “one in four secondary teachers were teaching abstinence as the only way to prevent pregnancy and STDs, compared with one in 50 in 1988.”

“This report confirms the clear trend we have witnessed across the country,” said Scott Phelps, Director of Program Development for Project Reality, a leading abstinence education provider based in the Chicago area. “We continue to receive strong support for our abstinence programs throughout Illinois and across the nation from students, parents, and teachers.” Phelps predicts that these survey numbers will continue to rise as the strong positive results of abstinence education become more apparent.

The responses of 3,754 teachers and nurses from across the country were recorded for the study. When asked what was the “most important message they wanted to convey to students,” the number-one response — given by 41% — was “abstinence.” In 1988, only 24% gave that response.

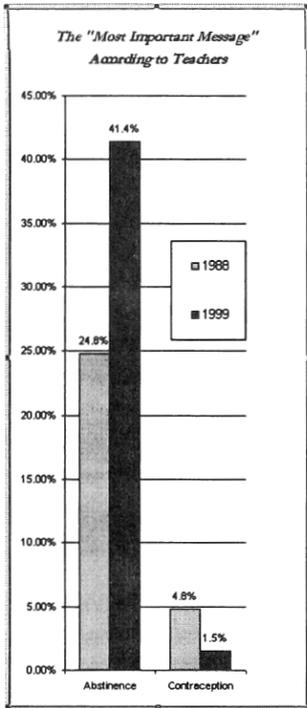
The study reveals a dramatic decline in the numbers of teachers and nurses who cited “contraception” as the most important message. Those listing con-

traception as a number-one response fell to 1.5% in 1999 from 4.8% in 1988. Though the disparity between respondents choosing abstinence and those choosing contraception was great in 1988 — 24% for abstinence vs. 4.8% for contraception — the difference continued to grow over the 10-year period, to 41% vs. 1.5% in 1999! The study further shows that 23% of teachers said they presented abstinence as the only way to prevent pregnancy and STDs in 1999, a steep increase from just 2% in 1988.

The study findings are consistent with recent reports of declines in unwed teen pregnancies. On August 8, the National Center for Health Statistics released a preliminary report on births in 1999. It showed that the teen birth rate declined 3% from 1998. According to the Beverly LaHaye Institute, the more significant finding is the continuing decline in unwed teen births. “The total teen birthrate is of dubious value because it mixes the measurements for both married and unmarried teens,” notes the LaHaye Institute’s *Data Digest* for October-November 2000.

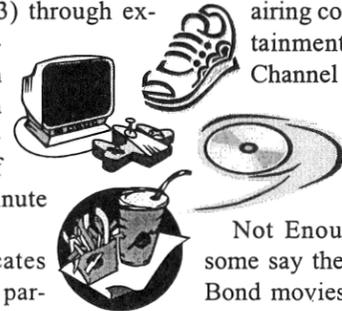
“Even with the 10-15% decline over the last five years, the unmarried rate is still more than three times its level in 1950,” quotes *Data Digest*. “That it should at last be on a downward trend is an extremely important and hopeful development — an encouraging sign of change in cultural values.”

Both Project Reality and the LaHaye Institute doubt the pro-choice media’s assumption that any drop in the unwed teen pregnancy rate must be due to abortion, contraception, and comprehensive sex education. They point out that the birth rates for unmarried women 20 and older do not show similar declines. It is more likely, they reason, that the lower teen birthrate is due to greater numbers of teens becoming more receptive to the abstinence message. These curricula and presentations, they say, are helping teens understand that abstinence from sexual activity until marriage is possible, that it has priceless personal benefits, and that it offers the safest, healthiest lifestyle. 



## Study Says Commercialism Rampant in Public Schools

WASHINGTON, DC — A government report released in September shows commercialism in public schools to be “widespread and on the rise.” In a first-ever comprehensive congressional investigation of commercial activities in the classroom, Congressman George Miller (D-CA), a member of the Committee on Education and the Workforce, and Sen. Christopher Dodd (D-CT), requested the report from the General Accounting Office (GAO). The report shows a proliferation of advertising (1) on school buses, (2) in the classroom, (3) through exclusive soft drink contracts, and (4) through the in-class TV program Channel One (which includes two minutes of commercials per 12-minute broadcast).



“This report indicates that many schools and parents are not prepared for the onslaught of marketers trying to reach the lucrative youth market through the classroom,” Miller said. “Parents, school officials and policymakers should take a close look at school policies on commercialism and make informed decisions about what they want children exposed to at school. If schools are going to encourage students to drink soda at 9:00 in the morning, for example, parents might want to be made aware of that fact.”

Miller accused companies of “seeking to exploit the educational platform of our schools to launch the sale of their products.” He referenced a Sept. 11 Federal Trade Commission report which notes

that inappropriate movies and records with explicit lyrics were promoted in school settings with no indication that parents were aware of it. “Ultimately,” said Miller, “commercialism in schools is yet another way in which the parent-child relationship is interfered with by corporate interests.”

### Marketing Violent Entertainment

In a news release dated Sept. 8, Birmingham, AL-based child advocacy and media watchdog group Obligation Inc. accused Channel One of routinely airing commercials for violent entertainment over the past four years. Channel One ads promoted “Supernova” (a film containing nudity, profanity and violence), “The Quest,” “Bats,” “The World Is Not Enough” (the most recent and some say the most violent of the James Bond movies), and the TV show “New York Undercover.”

Obligation’s Education Director Pat Ellis noted that although her organization reviews less than 30% of all Channel One programming, what they have seen is very disturbing. “Last year, a few weeks after the Columbine shootings, Channel One ran a terrifying commercial for a very violent movie called ‘The Mummy,’” Ellis recalled. “It was filled with gun violence, gruesome deaths and a graphic hanging scene. Schools should be a marketplace for ideas, not products, and especially not violent movies.”

### Commercialism in all 50 States

The GAO report analyzed laws and *(See Commercialism, page 4)*

## House Supports Homeschoolers

WASHINGTON, DC — On Sept. 26, the U.S. House of Representatives approved a resolution in support of homeschooling introduced by Congressman Bob Schaffer (R-CO). The text reads: “Congratulating home educators and homeschooled students across the nation for their ongoing contributions to education and for the role they play in promoting and ensuring a brighter, stronger future for this nation, and for other purposes.”

Following the vote, Schaffer said: “Home educators and students have produced positive results. I’m proud to recognize parents and children who have pioneered this type of education.” He praised homeschoolers for scoring highest on the ACT three years in a row and for scoring highest on the SAT this year. He noted

that homeschooled students dominated the 2000 Scripps-Howard National Spelling Bee (See *Education Reporter*, July 2000) by taking the top three positions in the prestigious event.

A member of the House Education and the Workforce Committee, Schaffer added that he is “delighted to honor home school education and will continue to support the effort.” 



Rep. Bob Schaffer

## EDUCATION BRIEFS

**An Adrian, MO principal is under fire for permitting a strip-search of 4<sup>th</sup> graders for a missing war medal, which had been brought to school for show-and-tell and was later found on the classroom floor. The boys were taken one-by-one to a restroom and forced to strip to their underwear in front of the principal. Girls were frisked by a female teacher. Angry parents have contacted the ACLU and are demanding that the school district reprimand the principal, issue an apology and formulate a policy on searches. The district is investigating.**

**A 13-year-old Holly, MI girl was suspended for three days for removing her shirt in a co-ed gym class, while wearing only a bra underneath. Jessie Timm was protesting what she called the "sexist" policy at Sherman Middle School that prohibits all students from wearing tank tops but allows boys to remove their shirts during gym class. A spokesman for the Michigan Association of School Boards, which helps districts formulate policies, agreed that there is a double standard: "It's called the male and female anatomy, which is somewhat different between the waist and the neck." Nonetheless, the school is rumored to have changed its dress code to require boys to wear shirts.**

**A charter school in Fort Collins, CO is under fire for refusing to teach evolution. The Liberty Common Charter School in the Poudre School District has raised the ire of the local school board for dropping Project 2061, an advanced science curriculum that teaches the theory of evolution. Current school policy states that evolution is not part of the required curriculum and is not a topic of instruction. The State of Colorado does not mandate the teaching of human evolution. The dispute is in the hands of a state administrative law judge.**

**The Durham School Board in Toronto, Canada has curbed in-class readings of Harry Potter, after an unprecedented rash of parent protests about the books' promotion of witchcraft.**

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## New Laws Advance Gay Agenda in California

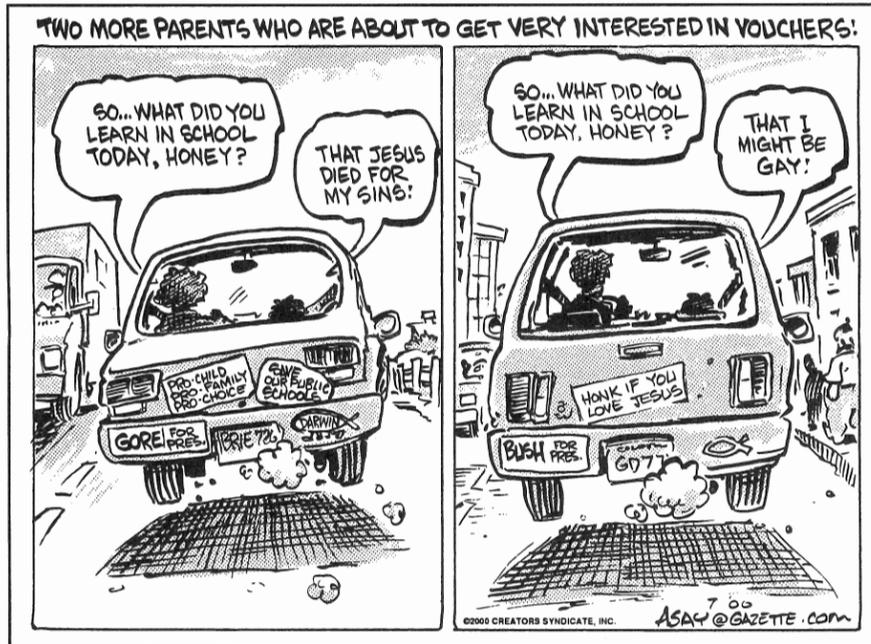
SACRAMENTO, CA — Governor Gray Davis has signed AB 1785 into law, a bill requiring all school children to be taught acceptance of homosexual behavior beginning in the elementary grades. The Governor also signed AB 1931, which calls for all school personnel to be trained to "identify and determine" what constitutes hate violence at school. This "training" will include how to determine "motive" for student behavior.

An Oct. 2 report on the two bills by the internet newsletter *CitizenLink* quoted Randy Thomasson, director of the voucher-supporting Campaign for California Families, as saying: "Gray Davis is fueling the passage of Proposition 38" [California's voucher initiative on the November ballot]. "Now that he has targeted children for gay indoctrination in the public schools, moms and dads everywhere will vote for the voucher to res-

cue their kids from the gay agenda and get them into a safer private school."

Attorney Brad Dacus, head of the Pacific Justice Institute, says AB 1785 will even require teachers of immigrant students to support its highly controversial social perspective. According to Dacus, "The bill also potentially challenges the ability of students to express their own personal religious convictions and objections to homosexuality."

AB 1931 appropriates \$2 million in taxpayer funds for "tolerance" field trips that address "intolerance," "hatred," and "prejudice," opening the door to additional pro-homosexual instruction. Another \$150,000 will fund an undisclosed "tolerance" organization to advise school administrators. "These new laws are a clear infringement of both the First Amendment and the fundamental right of parents over their children," Dacus said.



## Teen's Website Takes on Channel One

OIL CITY, PA — Oil City High School sophomore Ken McNatt has created a website to expose what he calls the "problem" of Channel One. While his chief complaint involves Channel One's two minutes of advertising for "junk food, shoes and video games," he notes that the daily 12-minute broadcasts have this year been "consistently almost 13 minutes long, a waste of student time which is funded by taxpayers like my parents."

Ken says he believes commercialism in the classroom is unethical. "At first, I complained about Channel One because I had to be quiet for 12 minutes a day," he admits. Daily exposure to the programming prompted him to do some research, and he found more important reasons to dislike Channel One. He began designing a website to inform other students and wrote an article on the subject for Obligation Inc., an organization that has been working for years to remove Channel One from the classroom. The article can be viewed on Obligation Inc.'s website:

[www.obligation.org/kenmcnatt.html](http://www.obligation.org/kenmcnatt.html).

While Channel One's broadcasts are billed as news and current events, Ken cites a Vassar College and Johns Hopkins University study which shows that only 20% of its air time is actually devoted to coverage of "recent political, economic, social, and cultural stories." The remaining 80% is spent on sports, weather, natural disasters, and advertising.

As Mr. McNatt's website points out, neither Primedia, which operates Channel One, nor Kohlberg, Kravis and Roberts, which owns Primedia, were in the news-gathering business prior to acquiring Channel One. Nonetheless, Channel One claims to be the primary news delivery vehicle for school-age Americans. Ken believes this is misleading. He describes one story that aired as "a report on how to cheat on a book report."

Ken welcomes input from other students. His email address is: [iceman\\_km@lycos.com](mailto:iceman_km@lycos.com) and his web address is [www.members.tripod.com/iceman\\_km/ChannelOnePage/](http://www.members.tripod.com/iceman_km/ChannelOnePage/)

## Book of the Month



**The War Against Boys**, Christina Hoff Summers, Simon & Schuster, 2000, 213 pps., \$25

"It's a bad time to be a boy in America. As the century drew to a close, the defining event for American girls was the triumph of the U.S. women's soccer team. For boys, the symbolic event was the mass killing at Columbine High School." So notes

### The War Against BOYS

HOW MISGUIDED FEMINISM IS HARMING OUR YOUNG MEN  
Christina Hoff Summers  
Author of *The State Feminist*

successful author and scholar Christina Hoff Summers as she opens her brilliant expose on the largely unspoken casualty of radical feminism — America's male youth.

Summers writes that, although many boys performed heroically during the nightmare at Columbine — one boy paid with his life while helping others escape — the two "morbid killers" seem to have become representative of "the nature of boyhood." She calls this distortion "profoundly misguided and deeply disrespectful of boys in general."

"I realized that no one was telling the real story about how boys and girls are faring," Summers says. "According to conventional wisdom girls are second class citizens in school, but nothing could be farther from the truth."

Summers builds her case by revealing the fatally flawed research of girl advocacy groups including the American Association of University Women, the Ms. Foundation and the Wellesley Center, which have painted American society as a "girl-poisoning" and "girl-destroying culture." She points out that, far from being demoralized, girls now outshine boys in nearly every educational sphere. Girls outnumber boys on most college campuses: 1997 figures show an overall percentage of 55% girls to 45% boys.

"If America's teenage girls are silenced, tortured, voiceless, and otherwise personally diminished," writes Summers, "it has escaped the notice of conventional psychiatry." She notes however, that this baseless exercise in victimology has been accepted as fact, and that boys have garnered resentment and are viewed as obstacles to "gender justice."

*The War Against Boys* tells the tragic story of "how it has become fashionable to attribute pathology to millions of healthy male children and how, in turning against boys, society is forgetting a simple truth: that the energy, competitiveness, and corporal daring of normal, decent males is responsible for much of what is right in the world."

Simon & Schuster, ISBN: 0-684-84956-9, [www.simonsays.com](http://www.simonsays.com)

# FOCUS:



## What Do Our Elected Officials Know About Education?



By B. K. Eakman

When Vice President Al Gore challenged George W. Bush by announcing that "[t]he time for generalities without specifics . . . is over," that it was "time to put up or shut up," some might have expected the candidates to fling down the gauntlet in education — by all accounts the number one campaign issue. Suppose they had dispensed with their sound bites about "school choice," "national standards," and "safe schools" and demonstrated a knowledge of the wrenching problems over which people are agonizing.

The media's obsession with bloopers has forced today's candidates to focus more on avoiding controversy than on engaging in substantive dialogue. Okay, so somebody gets the job anyway. Now let's find out what they really know. Here are the 20 most contentious education issues, posed as Q and A's (a grading scale follows):

1. Why are school tests (including those from previous years) held tighter than the Pentagon Papers (*i.e.*, exempted from the Freedom of Information Act) so that parents are refused access even after-the-fact?
2. What is it called when school tests and surveys ask what magazines are in their homes, whether parents have a dishwasher, and the family's favorite vacation spots?
3. What is "predictive computer technology," and how is it useful to experts in determining a student's future employability under School-to-Work legislation?
4. What is the primary focus of college course work for prospective educators, including curriculum and testing specialists?
5. What is "thought disruption" and how does it impact learning?
6. What is "cognitive dissonance," and how does it compromise parent-school cooperation?

7. How have terms like "remedial" and "handicap" been redefined so that parents erroneously believe their child will get special help?
8. How "individualized" is an IEP (Individual Education Plan), and what rights do parents have once they sign it?
9. What legal loophole permits the federal government to become involved in state and local curriculum?
10. What is a psychological "marker" (used in behavioral screening devices), and why is "strong religious belief" considered a marker for mental illness?
11. What level of privacy does the term "confidential" confer?
12. What federal law prevents Information Brokers from combing secure databases for "value and lifestyle" information and cross-matching it with political criteria or other public and private records?
13. What is "data-laundering"?
14. How far has school-related computer cross-matching come?
15. What are the two primary axioms of advertising, and how are they applied by educators?
16. How could schools assure nondiscriminatory testing and placement?
17. What is the most important ethic that today's teachers are expected to transmit?
18. What links Goals 2000, Outcome-Based Education and the School-to-Work/Careers Act?
19. What are the long-term effects of psychiatric drugs on growing bodies?
20. What do education experts consider the primary purpose of education?

**Answers:**

1. The rationale is that the validity of all tests and surveys will be compromised if a layperson sees any of them.
2. *Psychographics*: "the study of social class based on the demographics of income, race, religion, and personality traits."
3. By combining responses, pupils pro-

vide via self-reports and situational questionnaires with psychographic data, statisticians say they can predict how a child will likely react to future events. This

**TERMS LIKE "REMEDIAL" AND "HANDICAP" ARE BUZZWORDS FOR WAREHOUSING KIDS DEEMED "UNEDUCABLE" BY THE SYSTEM.**

train of thought so that logic cannot proceed. The continual interruptions built into the school day impede a child's ability to concentrate.

6. "Cognitive dissonance" means an unresolvable conflict resulting from attempts to reconcile two opposing "truths" simultaneously. When educators discredit parental teachings, youngsters cannot choose between two opposing "authorities."
7. These are buzz-terms for warehousing kids deemed "uneducable" by the system. Teacher training deals with emotions, not learning methodology.
8. Signing an IEP gives the school control over future education-related decisions and provides virtually no individualized help.
9. "Compelling state interest."
10. *Markers* are "risk factors." Firm religious belief has been linked to the dogmatic, authoritarian, and delusional personality.
11. *Confidential* means "need to know," not "anonymous." Data, including a person's identity, are shared with "approved" entities.
12. No federal law currently prevents database searches and cross-matches. Legal experts are having trouble differen-

capability can be turned into a political litmus test by college and job recruiters.

tiating between legitimate and illegitimate cross-matching.

13. "Data-laundering": Deleting or changing data surreptitiously to circumvent #12, above.
14. The SPEEDE/ExPRESS is the largest school collection-and-transfer "engine." WORKLINK, developed by the Educational Testing Service, provides a link to employers.
15. The primary axioms are: (1) "All consumer behavior is predictable," and (2) "Consumer behavior can be changed." Advertisers were the first to employ psychographics as a means of targeting a market. The key is finding what makes the target population tick. School "tests" and surveys, rife with opinion-oriented questions, provide this key. Curriculum becomes the advertising package for social change.
16. Nondiscriminatory practices center on learning processes — (*i.e.*, spatial reasoning, perceptual speed, auditory memory, etc.).
17. "Interdependence" — *i.e.*, the group is more important than the individual and consensus more important than principle.
18. Funding: Legislators who vote for one inadvertently vote for all three.
19. Psychiatric drugs haven't been around long enough to know.
20. "To change the students' fixed beliefs." (Dr. Benjamin Bloom)

**Grading Scale (correct answers):**

- 19-20 = Fit for public office
- 17-18 = Study up for debates
- 14-16 = Easily manipulated by special interests
- 12-13 = Frankly, my dear, you don't know diddly about schools.

*B. K. Eakman, a former teacher-turned-science editor and speechwriter, is the author of Cloning of the American Mind: Eradicating Morality Through Education (Huntington House). An edited version of this article has appeared in the Washington Times and Insight Magazine.*

## Home-Grown Students Build Better Robot

NORMAN, OK — The first homeschool team ever to participate in the annual Botball National Robotics Tournament placed first in the head-to-head combat championship and second overall in the 2000 competition held Aug. 1-2 in Austin, TX. According to *The New American* magazine (10-9-00), Botball is the most popular of the new "techno-sports" that are stirring high school students' interest in engineering and science.

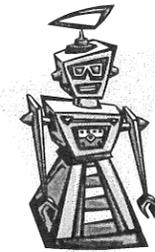
Calling themselves the Norman-Area Homeschoolers, the team was unique in that its members (ranging in age from 11 to 16) were younger than their fellow competitors. Equally remarkable was the fact that, excluding siblings, the nine members had not known each other prior to forming the Botball team.

The homeschoolers placed third in the seedings phase of the competition, which tests the robots' "intelligence" under ideal conditions. They were victorious over the number-one seed, Florida's Paxton School for Advanced Studies, in the most difficult phase of the competition, the combat championship, which tests the robots' skills in a hostile environment. The homeschoolers also won the tournament's "judges award" and remained undefeated in the double elimination combat round.

"It [Paxton] had the most intelligent robot I have ever seen," said Michele Moore, mother of one of the team members who was quoted in the *Norman Transcript* newspaper, "but it could not deal with real life. We defeated it in combat rounds."

The robots were constructed using theories from the Mars Pathfinder Rover project. The *Norman Transcript* noted that each "was as unique as its programmers and designers, even though the teams received identical kinds of legos, sensors, motors, a microprocessor, software and a manual." Mrs. Moore explained that the Lego kits are actually very challenging. "These aren't the Legos we played with as kids," she said.

Botball competitions are conducted on 8' x 12' boards. The robots score points by correctly performing maneuvers with colored balls and demonstrating both offensive and defensive skills in head-to-head competition. The robots are not remote-controlled, but are programmed to operate autonomously.



While the Paxton robot finished first overall due to the points it accumulated during the seed rounds, members of the Norman Homeschoolers were "justifiably jubilant" at their achievements. A

total of 41 teams from 10 states participated in the tournament.

The Oklahoma-based KISS Institute of Practical Robotics — a private organization founded in 1993 — sponsors the national Botball tournament as well as regional competitions. Botball teams can also compete at the annual conference of the American Association for Artificial Intelligence (another Botball sponsor), which attracts top U.S. scientists and engineers. The first national Botball tournament was held in 1997.



## Commercialism (Continued from page 1)

policies dealing with commercialism in all 50 states and found them "uneven and inadequate." Only 19 states currently have statutes or regulations that address school-related commercial activities and they vary widely. For example, Michigan law fails to address commercial activities at all, while New Mexico specifically allows advertising on school buses. California, New York, Florida, Illinois and Maine have policies expressly permitting or prohibiting three or more types of commercial activities. New York generally prohibits commercial activities on school premises. In California, school boards must hold hearings before approving many types of commercial contracts.

The GAO raised concerns that school district policies have not yet adapted to changes in commercial technologies, noting that "none are targeted towards newer forms of media-based advertising, such as those delivered by Channel One and ZapMe." (See related story below.) Miller said it would be a mistake to suggest that commercial contracts can make up the

whole difference caused by financial constraints without having additional ramifications. "Children are distracted enough as it is," he observed, "without being further enticed by computer pop-up ads for jeans and sneakers, or campus billboards boasting soft drinks and candy."

Miller and Dodd have introduced legislation to protect student privacy from market researchers. Their bill, the Student Privacy Protection Act, would require parental consent before children can participate in commercial market research in school, including opinion surveys and monitoring of web browsing habits.

### Commercialism in Action

Miller and Dodd requested the GAO report after hearing of numerous examples of commercialism in schools:

- ◆ A Colorado school district administrator sent a letter urging principals to allow students virtually unlimited access to Coke machines and to consider allowing drinks in classrooms to increase sales and therefore profits for the school. (See *Education Reporter*, January 2000).

## ZapMe! Zapped! Company Sells Stock, Changes Course



SAN RAMON, CA — In a dramatic move last month, ZapMe!, the company that offers "free" computers, satellite dishes and "netspace" to U.S. schools in return for advertising to captive students, announced it will sell the controlling interest to its satellite supplier. Gilat Networks Ltd. will purchase 51% of ZapMe!'s outstanding stock at a price of \$2.32 per share and will steer the company in a new direction, away from an advertiser-based presence in schools.

"ZapMe! has raised the white flag and everyone who has fought advertising in the classroom had a hand in this great victory," said Jim Metrock, president of Obligation Inc., an organization that has worked tirelessly to remove ZapMe! and Channel One from the classroom. "Big Money has been clobbered," he adds. "ZapMe! went public at \$10 per share in the fall of 1998, and the price fell quickly to \$5. The company then hired a 'superstar' CEO, and the stock climbed to a high of \$13-3/4." Less than a year ago, the stock sold for \$12 a share.

Metrock explains what happened to cause such a turnaround. "ZapMe! ran into the unlikely alliance of conservative, liberal and progressive groups, privacy activists, academics, and child advocates. The stock recently fell to a low of \$1-9/16. Then came news of the sale on Oct. 3. This is unquestionably a pivotal development in our effort to combat the commercial exploitation of schoolchildren."

ZapMe! is expected to immediately begin reducing its emphasis on providing free computers and internet service paid for by advertising. A joint ZapMe!/Gilat press release announced: "Currently

served schools will continue to receive internet service, although going forward the company will discontinue the installation of free computer labs for schools."

Metrock extends his congratulations to all who raised awareness of ZapMe! in the press, among the grassroots, and on Capitol Hill. "This could have easily been another Channel One," he notes, "and we all had a part in dismantling ZapMe!'s plan to advertise in schools and track and profile children as they surfed the web."

ZapMe! contracted with schools to loan up to 15 computers and accessories free of charge, along with internet access to 13,000 ZapMe!-approved websites. In return, schools were required to have a student sitting at every computer for a minimum of four hours per day, although more recent ZapMe! contracts have not included the minimum usage requirement. "Banner" ads run continuously in the bottom left corner of each computer screen. If a child clicks on this "dynamic billboard," the whole screen becomes a commercial. Some ads become full-blown TV-like commercials.

Some of the earlier web sites accessible on ZapMe!'s "Netspace" web server contained inappropriate material such as advertisements for violent video games. (See *Education Reporter*, February 2000.) In addition, students' web surfing habits were tracked and sent to marketers, who use the information to target products directly to students.

"We'll have to watch developments with ZapMe!," cautions Jim Metrock, "but we can tentatively say: 'We won this one.' This news should send a shot across the bow of Channel One." 

- ◆ A student was suspended in Georgia for wearing a Pepsi shirt on a school-sponsored "Coke Day."

- ◆ The roof of a Texas school is painted with a Dr. Pepper logo to be seen by passing planes.

- ◆ 40% of middle and high school students view two minutes of commercials every day on Channel One.

- ◆ School buses in a Colorado district are covered with Old Navy and 7-Up logos.

- ◆ A math textbook teaches students about fractions by having them calculate how many kids prefer the Sony Play Station to Sega Saturn.

### Brand Name Children's Books

The *New York Times* (9-22-00) described the "sudden proliferation of children's books starring brand-name candies and snacks like Froot Loops, Cheerios, M&M's, Pepperidge Farm Goldfish, Reese's Pieces, Skittles, Hershey's chocolates, Sun-Maid raisins and Oreo cookies." A pre-school teacher launched the concept in 1994 when her *M&M's Brand Counting Book* was finally published by Charlesbridge after being turned down by 35 other publishers. It quickly became the publishing house's biggest seller.

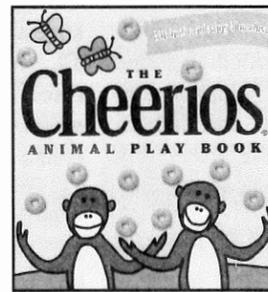
The trend caught fire with some pre-school and kindergarten teachers and parents. Commenting on *The Cheerios Play Book*, which has sold 1.2 million copies during the past two years, one kindergarten teacher told the *New York Times*: "We love it! You hate to always use food, but it is such a hit with the kids, because they can count them and then it is so rewarding for them to eat them." More

recently, brand-name books have been geared toward elementary schoolchildren, including *Reese's Pieces: Count by Fives*; the *Hershey's Milk Chocolate Bar Fractions Book*; and *Skittles Math Riddles*.

Not everyone approves of the concept. Some specialty children's bookstores have refused to stock many of the books, and some teachers have described them as "an abuse." Parents, pediatricians and educators have objected that the books "will engrave snack food brands in toddlers' impressionable minds, hook them on junk food, and lead to eating problems later in life."

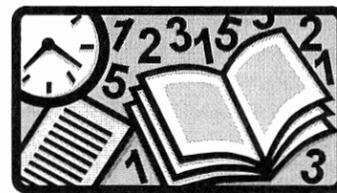
Though brand name snack books have collectively sold millions of copies and have been published by such heavyweights as Simon and Schuster and Scholastic, some publishers disapprove of the trend. Kate Klimo, publisher of Random House's children's division, called the books "advertising and P.R. for the food manufacturers, and as such, vaguely reprehensible."

Miriam Bar-on, MD, a professor of pediatrics at Chicago's Loyola University, who is also chairman of the public education committee of the American Academy of Pediatrics, put it more strongly in the *New York Times*: "I think the whole thing is revolting, to be targeting these little kids with that kind of marketing," she said. "You want to use food for nutrition — you don't want food to seem more powerful than it is." 



## Assigning Students' Lives Away How much homework is enough?

PISCATAWAY, NJ — Following numerous parent complaints of children burning the midnight oil to complete multiple lengthy assignments, the Piscataway school board voted recently to limit the amount of homework teachers can



give. Elementary school teachers may assign no more than 30 minutes of homework on week nights, while high school teachers may dole out as much as two hours' worth. The district has 7,000 mostly middle-class students, 70% of whom go on to college.

According to the *New York Times* (10-10-00), the Piscataway school board, which unanimously approved the new policy, said homework "was putting too much pressure on students' already overscheduled lives, too often dragging parents into helping finish it and becoming a substitute for good teaching in the classroom."

Some educators agree that excessive homework disrupts family life and puts undue pressure on parents' time. Children consumed by homework, they say, are unable to make room for other ben-

eficial pursuits such as music lessons, dance lessons, or little league.

Studies on the effects of homework vary. Some show no link between homework and high achievement, others show mixed results.

Since the advent of the public school, homework has been a bone of contention for teachers, students and parents. In the 1930s, large cities including New York and Chicago, as well as the American Child Health Association, compared homework to child labor. After the Soviet Union launched Sputnik in 1957, American parents and pundits lamented that education in the U.S. was failing to keep up with that of other nations. Homework soared in popularity. After the publication of the famous report "A Nation At Risk" in 1983, homework was again perceived by some as a panacea.

As for parents in Piscataway, most are happy with the new limits on homework. The superintendent has become a hero. He's receiving calls at his office and on talk radio from parents all over New Jersey and even from other states asking how to persuade their schools to limit their children's homework. 